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“The sailors dearly love to make up”: Cross-Dressing and Blackface during Polar Exploration

Mossakowski, Tomasz Filip

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“The sailors dearly love to make up”:
Cross-Dressing and Blackface during
Polar Exploration

Tomek Mossakowski

King’s College London
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Abstract

This research project writes against the hegemonic narratives of polar exploration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using the published and unpublished diaries of explorers from 1819 to 1904, it asks how queer, critical race and postcolonial critiques of the hyper-masculine, all-white image of the polar explorer can open up new understandings of polar spaces both in the nineteenth century and today, when similar nationalistic, colonial enterprises are at play. Primarily informed by Lisa Bloom's feminist, postcolonial review of American ideologies of polar exploration, this project discusses the large disparity between the intensely masculine image of the polar hero-adventurer and the particularly Anglo-American, but also Norwegian, tendency to perform drag during polar expeditions. It also examines the high incidence of blackface theatre: in one of the whitest spaces conceivable, sailors donned the black mask to air a complex constellation of white, colonial and class grievances and aspirations. Polar performance, which evolved to have its own idiosyncrasies shaped by the natural and social polar environment, affected colonial relations with Inuit, the stuff of farce being pressed into the service of imperial force. Indigenous populations witnessed grotesque displays of Anglo-American gendered and racial values through theatrical recreation, while simultaneously resisting the encroachment of expedition society through similar but seemingly smaller avenues of performative resistance. Broadly speaking, this project offers this more radical, revisionist interpretation at a time when interest in the Arctic and Antarctic is soaring due to anthropogenic climate change. It challenges the current reappropriation of heroic, hyper-masculine figures by national and

private interests through celebrating their lesser-known but equally fascinating mid-winter activities.

Table of Contents

Title page	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	4
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Figures	7
Table of Expeditions	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1	52
From the Royal Arctic Theatre to “negro songs”: Polar performance in the first half of the nineteenth century	
Chapter 2	114
“Smith, <i>à la negro!</i> ”: Blackface, Americanisation, Inuit womanhood and Charles Francis Hall’s first Arctic expedition	
Chapter 3	163
<i>Breaking the Ice</i> : The hegemony of climate, physical culture and the performance of <i>A Ticket-of-Leave</i> during the <i>Discovery</i> Expedition	
Chapter 4	224
<i>Black Ice</i> : The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe, plantation songs and the stuff of farce and force	
Conclusion	288
Bibliography	311

Acknowledgements

This project began three years ago when I returned from life at the top of the world, or, the northernmost reaches of Norway. Leaving my idyllic, Scandinavian surroundings wasn't easy and, worse yet, I was now a faceless Londoner starting a towering undertaking at an impressive college. Though I began with a sense of optimism, this was soon replaced by a nauseating cycle of mental ups and downs. Throughout it all however, Northern Norway (one of the most beautiful places on the planet) remained with me like a recurring dream. Without Arctic inspiration, I would have never finished this thesis. I hope it will go some way to joining the conversation about climate change.

I would also have never finished, or even started, this project if it weren't for my supervisor and friend, John Howard. His support, enthusiasm, humour and patience have seen me through. He has, to borrow his own words, continually pushed my thinking and given me much to meditate on. I would also like to thank Mark Turner for all the comments, both constructive and funny, and Uta Balbier for helping me when it was really needed. Thanks go to the Institute of North American Studies and Americanists in the English department at King's College London. In particular Jo McDonagh and Ed Sugden helped create opportunities.

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Table of figures

Figure 1	Actors in the Crossing the Line ceremony	178
Figure 2	The cast of <i>A Ticket-of-Leave</i>	211
Figure 3	The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe	241
Figure 4	<i>Flying Scud</i>	283
Figure 5	Marston “Putty the inimitable”	290

Table of Expeditions

A table of expeditions referenced in this thesis.

Expedition Name	Commander	Number of ships	Destination	Years	Principal chronicler
Parry's first voyage	William Edward Parry (British)	2 (<i>Hecla</i> and <i>Griper</i>)	Northwest Passage	1819–20	William Edward Parry
Parry's second voyage	William Edward Parry (British)	2 (<i>Hecla</i> and <i>Fury</i>)	Northwest Passage	1821–23	William Edward Parry
Franklin's Lost Expedition	John Franklin (British)	2 (<i>Erebus</i> and <i>Terror</i>)	Northwest Passage	1845–?	None, all crew disappeared
Austin's rescue expedition	Horatio Austin (British)	4 (<i>Resolute</i> , <i>Assistance</i> , <i>Pioneer</i> , <i>Intrepid</i>)	Eastern Arctic	1850–51	Clements Markham, Horatio Austin
First Grinnell Expedition	Edwin De Haven (American)	2 (<i>Advance</i> and <i>Rescue</i>)	Eastern Arctic	1850–51	Elisha Kent Kane
Hall's first Arctic expedition	Sidney Budington (American)	1 (<i>George Henry</i> (whaler))	King William Island	1860–62	Charles Francis Hall
British Arctic Expedition	George Nares (British)	2 (<i>Alert</i> and <i>Discovery</i>)	North Pole	1875–76	Clements Markham, George Nares
<i>Discovery</i> Expedition	Robert Falcon Scott (British)	1 (<i>Discovery</i>)	Antarctica	1901–04	Robert Falcon Scott
<i>Nimrod</i> Expedition	Ernest Shackleton (British)	1 (<i>Nimrod</i>)	South Pole	1907–09	Ernest Shackleton
Amundsen's South Pole expedition	Roald Amundsen (Norwegian)	1 (<i>Fram</i>)	South Pole	1910–12	Roald Amundsen
Australasian Antarctic Expedition	Douglas Mawson (Australian)	1 (<i>Aurora</i>)	Antarctica	1911–14	Douglas Mawson

Introduction

In 1853, Peter Simmonds, a journalist and writer, released a book about Arctic exploration in the first half of the nineteenth century. Consider his account of a cold day in October 1821, during British naval officer William Edward Parry's second expedition to find the fabled Northwest Passage:

Preparations were now made for occupation and amusement, so as to pass away pleasantly the period of detention. A good stock of theatrical dresses and properties having been laid in by the officers before leaving England, arrangements were made for performing plays fortnightly, as on their last winter residence, as a means of amusing the seamen, and in some degree to break the tedious monotony of their confinement. As there could be no desire, or hope of excelling, every officer's name was readily entered on the list of *dramatis personæ*, Captain Lyon kindly undertaking the difficult office of manager. Those *ladies* (says Lyon) who had cherished the growth of their beards and whiskers, as a defence against the inclemency of the climate, now generously agreed to do away with such unfeminine ornaments, and every thing bade fair for a most stylish theater.¹

What is the most striking aspect of this loaded extract? Is it that “heroic” polar explorers, considered the epitome of masculinity, cross-dressed out on the ice, described as a prison, when temperatures were dangerously low? Is it that this cross-dressing was such an established, awaited tradition that men known for their bravery thought to pack dresses at the expense of potentially life-saving supplies? Or is it that these men actually did away with their facial hair, crucial for keeping the face warm, so that they could more convincingly portray women?

Why did this “passage” from imperial West to East (by the compass, a movement from east to west) entail colonial “occupation”? Why, during the

¹ Peter Simmonds, *The Arctic Regions, and Polar Discoveries During the Nineteenth Century* (Buffalo: Derby, Orton & Mulligan, 1853), 72.

winter “period of detention,” iced in, did notions of occupation arise in tandem with ideas about “amusement”? How could elite “officers” imagine that a good stock of dresses and props would assuage the unique tedium of “confinement” as experienced by ordinary “seamen”? Why would this officer class transform themselves into women (and, later, “darkies”) to forestall working-class sailors’ discontent? How and when were sailors allowed “to make up” and take the stage? Onstage and off, who would hold the limelight? Who would be thrown into shadow? Who would be frozen out of such imperial endeavours? In short, what role did theatrical culture, high and low, play in the dramatic unfolding of “exploration” and conquest?

Perhaps most striking is the fact that in 1853 a journalist considered this cross-dressing so normative that he willingly gave it room in his narrative, whereas today’s polar historiography has purposefully waylaid this colourful, vibrant drag, deeming it incommensurable with the modern image of explorers and their appropriation by national and private interests.

Though not a first-hand account, Simmonds’ passage can be matched by extracts from countless expedition diaries, each as extravagant, almost preposterous, as the next. During exploration of the Arctic and Antarctic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, naval men, scientists and civilians regularly cross-dressed and blacked-up on stages built on deck or land during long winters on ice, a fact neatly glossed over in the many celebratory histories of expeditions. Though audiences present and at home may have found polar cross-dressing a rather insignificant albeit amusing matter, this project takes a far more critical view. Instead, it writes against the hegemonic narratives of polar exploration through a careful re-examination of recreational cross-dressing and

blackface. Using the published and unpublished diaries of Anglo-American polar explorers from 1819 to 1904, it argues that these iconic figures, complicit in the social construction of white masculinity, regularly refashioned their sexual and racial personas on the frozen frontier, paradoxically interrogating the very gendered ideologies, racial hierarchies and classed segregations that nationalistic expeditions sought to perpetuate.

Farce and force during polar exploration

Lisa Bloom's feminist postcolonial review of polar exploration, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Exploration*, the first critical enquiry into hegemonic polar narratives, primarily informs this project.² However, "*The sailors dearly love to make up*" updates the revisionist study of the Arctic and Antarctic by asking for a much-needed queer reading of polar exploration. It discusses the large disparity between the hyper-masculine image of the polar hero-adventurer and the tendency to perform drag with all its homoerotic connotations. Men went to the icy testing grounds of the poles to reconfirm their masculinity in freezing temperatures, while supporters back home awaited news of sensational feats. At the poles, however, there was a different kind of sensationalism at play as explorers-cum-actors donned make-up and frock to be jeered and whistled at on stage. Heroic, nationalistic enterprise could, in fact, create radical space for men to explore their gendered and sexualised personas.

This was not solely an Anglo-American predilection: Norwegians cross-dressed and blacked-up too. During Roald Amundsen's successful journey to the

² Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Explorations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

South Pole in the early twentieth century, one man became a racy ballerina, another a dancing “nigger,” while the *Fram* was at sea. The quote below, highly suggestive as it is, effectively demonstrates the polar explorers’ predisposition for sexually and racially charged sartorial play, as well as the transnationalism of its many actors and their sites of materialisation. Put differently, men of different nationalities and cultures were bound by a shared appreciation of men dressed as women and “darkies” so as to complicate traditional notions of territory, suggesting that uncharted land, water, and ice was a “frontier” both geographically and for racialised, gender experimentation.

One night, sailing south across the Atlantic – as Amundsen wrote in his published account – a small “orchestra” began to perform, then gramophone records were played:

There appeared in the companion-way a real ballet-girl, masked, and in very short skirts. The unexpected apparition from a better world was greeted with warm applause... Behind the mask could be detected Gjersten’s face, but both costume and dance were in the highest degree feminine. Rönne was not satisfied until he had the “lady” on his knees – hurrah for illusion! The gramophone now changed to a swinging American cake-walk, and at the same moment there opportunely appeared on the scene a nigger.³

As with the passage above by Simmonds, the sartorial play of polar-expedition society cannot help but invite a plethora of questions. What did Gjersten’s feminised face and legs represent, beyond the “better world” of Europe, as Amundsen called it? In the raucous atmosphere of this all-male smoker – fuelled by “coffee, liqueurs, and cigars” – did Rönne force Gjersten onto *his* knees or *hers*? In the pecking order of naval authority, what did it mean for Amundsen’s

³ Roald Amundsen, *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the “Fram” 1910-1912* (Bremen: Salzwasser Verlag, 2010), 98–99.

“second in command” to dance onstage as a “nigger”? If “the mere sight of him was enough to set us all shrieking with laughter,” how did Amundsen’s laughter differ from that of ordinary sailors?⁴ During this crossing-the-Equator celebration, in transit from the Portuguese colonies (and former slave stations) of Madeira and Cape Verde to the new Republic of Brazil, what types of sailors, stowaways, and shanghaied, unfree labourers might have witnessed these performances? How was it that one dance followed so “opportunistically” – immediately and *naturally* – after the other? What did that reveal about the distinct yet overlapping hierarchies of gender and race at this historical moment in these varied imperial and (post)colonial contexts?

To answer these myriad questions in part, this study offers a queer, critical-race revision of the category of heroism. It does so through an examination of theatrical recreation, but more than this, it also foregrounds the climatic environments of the Arctic and Antarctic as facilitators of same-sex desire, thereby addressing a key oversight in the humanities: temperature’s relation to nearly every social process.⁵ I argue that the freezing temperature inadvertently eroticised individuated and aggregated bodies. The climatic environment provided new standards for how officers, scientists and sailors were to feel and function: it drew the heavily gendered bodies of explorers together to share warmth, a physical intimacy that defied social segregations, while the dark, depressive polar winter led men to worry obsessively about their bodily and

⁴ Amundsen, *The South Pole*, 99.

⁵ Work on temperature’s relation to human interaction is currently extremely limited. There are two exceptions, both primarily addressed in Chapter 3, though I continually engage with climatic temperatures throughout the thesis: Marsha Ackermann, *Cool Comfort: America’s Romance with Air-Conditioning* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Stephanie Clare, “Feeling Cold: Phenomenology, Spatiality and the Politics of Sensations,” *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 24:1 (2013): 169–91.

mental health. This introspection became, in turn, a polar literary tradition when men put their anxieties to paper.

Such negative structures of feeling were present from the outset, during what is often considered the first polar expedition, when Parry, regarded as the founding figure of polar exploration, first attempted to sail through the Northwest Passage in the Arctic. As discussed in Chapter 1, Parry recognised the subversive potential of bodily and mental degradation in the darkness and cold, believing it would result in social implosion, or worse, same-sex desire. Parry enforced a timetable of performative acts such as exercise, inspections, regulated cleaning and, crucially, theatre to overcome widespread anxieties and promote “anticipatory discipline.”⁶ Paradoxically, these new social enterprises quickly became inflected with queer desire, much as they would during later expeditions, especially Robert Falcon Scott’s exploration of Antarctica. Inspections both private and public created an arena where men could gaze upon one another with license.⁷

This thesis does not argue that homosexuality as we understand it today flourished at the poles but rather that there was a discernable level of homoeroticism or queer desire (discernable to the attuned historian and discernable in part to the men putting on performances) during expeditions. By queer, I am referring to a desire generally considered non-normative but I do not

⁶ W. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 128.

⁷ There is a strong body of work on the queerness of physicality-as-salvation. See, for example: Bloom, *Gender on Ice*; John Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Colin Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Greg Mullins, “Nudes, Prudes, and Pigmies: The Desirability of Disavowal in ‘Physical Culture,’” *Discourse* 15 (1992): 27–48; Patrick Scott, “Body-Building and Empire-Building: George Douglas Brown, The South African War, and *Sandow’s Magazine of Physical Culture*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41:1 (2008): 78–94; David Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in U.S. Military Culture, 1800-1945,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9:1–2 (2003): 149–79.

seek to provide a distinct, neatly formulated definition. Rather, I wish to suggest that queerness can be located in oddities and breakages from expectations, in culturally strange desires and devices, that queerness is to be understood in terms of sexuality but in addition that it simultaneously plays with and challenges class, race, colonial order and other constructs, and that this queerness is even more pronounced when it appears in especially celebrated societies such as those of masculine explorers. Desire, then, may mean a temporary, appreciative glance at the heroic body of a blacked-up sailor by an officer. Similarly, while drag, discussed below, may not be inherently homoerotic itself, it is the briefly opened window of queer desire, that strange and seductive slippage, that is of interest to this thesis.

Wherever bodies degraded in the low temperatures during Parry's expeditions and all thereafter, farce was never far away. A host of performative, palliative practices provided a sense of resistance to the environment's brutal hegemony. Polar performance, beginning with the Royal Arctic Theatre in the 1810s, evolved to have its own idiosyncrasies shaped by the natural and social polar environment. The American influence on polar theatrics was exemplified by the singing of "negro songs" during the First Grinnell Expedition to the Arctic, performed on Christmas Day 1850. I argue that these songs were a fitting cultural signifier around which ailing men could assemble in severe climatic conditions. Clearly, however, performance's palliative nature extended to officers' and sailors' sexualities, which were shrouded by the literal darkness surrounding expeditions, as best shown by a drunken, gaudy masquerade ball in the 1850s. The high incidence of cross-dressing was a product of the homoeroticism that saturated homosocial expedition society, itself paradoxically

caused by the purposeful exclusion of women from polar space and the constricting sense of spatiality found in freezing temperatures.⁸ Though traditional historical documents provide as yet limited evidence of men who found sexual reprieve in the cold corridors of the ships – a methodological quandary discussed below – it is obvious that cross-dressing spoke to and allowed for a huge release of pent-up sexual tension. The performances considered in all chapters of this thesis point to how cross-dressing, a performative act generally considered undesirable in the context of hegemonic, militarised masculinities, was crucial to the success of expeditions and therefore paradoxically complicit in the maintenance of imperialist might. In this sense, farce and force were conjoined.

These licensed, sexualised arenas were, arguably, not as readily available back home, or at the very least, men who did not desire men would have had far less exposure to cross-dressing and inspection and contemplation of the male form. Men with queer desires, on the other hand, may have found expeditions a fitting place to be. Whatever longings existed, the fervour with which men rematerialised as women, both black and white, suggests that expedition societies were somewhat exceptional in their social make-up, providing new sexualised

⁸ For more on homosocial society and homoeroticism, especially as it relates to essentialised eras and spaces, see: Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003); William Benemann, *Men in Eden: William Drummond Stewart and Same-Sex Desire in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Barry Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001); Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand; Johnson, Just Queer Folks*; Jonathan Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Chris Packard, *Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Nicholas Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

experiences shared by both officer and sailor, despite the systematic segregation in both the theatre and reality. Put differently, there was an unusual intensification of opportunity in the context of these expeditions.

Of course, these liminal societies still provide a barometer of social and cultural change back home. Gendered, sexual, racial and colonial attitudes undeniably governed polar exploration, which existed as a condensed nexus of so many prominent discourses in nineteenth century Western society, from scientific to racist to expansionist. As the nineteenth century wore on to become the twentieth, the reaction to polar cross-dressing at the poles became more negative as it would do at home, as shown in the Conclusion.

But the uniqueness of polar space and the exceptional nature of expedition society – climate, claustrophobia, queerness – worked to accelerate and exacerbate such ideologies until even the men themselves felt something of their curious, occasionally queer, circumstances. In particular, theatrical performances exposed and troubled ideologies, both uncovering and reinforcing gross hypocrisies of Western, imperialist societies. This exceptionality was not isolated from home, despite geographical distance: there was a fluid, didactic and inseparable relationship between frontier and home, expeditions having an effect upon discourse upon return. And so by understanding and locating the extreme at the imperial periphery, it is possible to understand the normative at the centre.

The evidence suggests, then, that polar farce was hardly a benign form of entertainment. Explorers did not just go from heroic to erotic, jock to frock. They also blacked-up. In one of the whitest spaces conceivable, sailors donned the black mask to air a complex constellation of white, colonial and class grievances and aspirations. A central intervention of this thesis is that blackface performed

abroad interrogates the hegemony of the urban, commercialised forms of minstrelsy widely popular in American and British towns in the nineteenth century. In Chapter 2, I argue that blackface in the colonies, performed by working-class whalers, complicates the idea that blackface was a racial performance that spoke to black-white binaries in the context of America. The addition of a third class of racialised subjects to the narrative, Inuit, and the setting of its occurrence, outside the metropole, suggest that when blackface was released from the usual racial dyad to which it was tethered, it became a strategy of imparting coloniser values to the subjugated.

American explorer Charles Francis Hall, travelling to the Arctic in the 1860s, was infatuated with Inuit women, their hygiene and their allegedly innate ability to lead their race to that ever-revered Victorian endgame of “civilisation.” Hall documented a night of blackface, when a whaler cross-dressed and blacked-up in front of Inuit, and the supposedly hysterical terror, then laughter, which followed among the women. Here, the stuff of farce was pressed into the service of imperial force, as Inuit witnessed grotesque displays of Anglo-American gendered and racial values through demeaning theatrical recreation and the subjugation of the black Other. This theatrical performance, previously understudied, existed as an effective arm of overall colonial strategy, allowing both upper- and lower-class American colonisers to further their definitions of correct womanhood in front of Inuit through seemingly innocuous entertainment. However, not all explorer-Inuit interactions were so one-directional. Inuit simultaneously resisted the encroachment of expedition society through similar but smaller avenues of performative resistance, as outlined in Chapter 1, when

Inuit purposefully attempted to “disgust” Western men through exaggerated displays and inside jokes.

In an unexpected parallel to tropical near-nakedness, the idea that extreme cold climates could eroticise bodies was exposed most vividly during the British *Discovery* Expedition to Antarctica, 1901–04, led by Robert Falcon Scott, a heroic explorer whose contemporary popularity nears hagiographic levels. The climate of Antarctica regulated the microphysics of daily life for the crew of the *Discovery* Expedition: the freezing temperature drew the gendered, heroic bodies of explorers together for warmth; the darkness caused terrible moods and lingering depression; frostbite, the most regular and gruesome physical manifestation of cold temperature, turned the usually subjective experience of feeling cold into legitimate ailments and restricted access to the polar environment. The result was that the climate necessitated performative acts such as bodybuilding to reclaim a sense of agency over its constricting power. Frequent weightlifting and medical inspections, however, quickly became erotic arenas where men were given license to look at one another’s bodies. Similar to Parry’s expeditions, coldness was assumed to facilitate a new birth or augmentation of hardy masculinity, but it resulted in new shades of homoeroticism during some of the most celebrated, nationalistic exercises, inadvertently queering the heroic aura saturating the expedition.

The *Discovery*’s theatrical “lambs” put on a performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, a play exploring highly symbolic themes of imprisonment and return. But more than a simple allegory, the play was a cathartic, resistive endeavour that broke the hegemony of climate: members of the theatrical companies stood dangerously underdressed on stage in women’s clothing in defiance of low

temperatures even as noses and fingers became frosted over. On stage, the body became the primary site of contestation between man and environment, simultaneously allowing the audience a nostalgic glimpse at feminine, able-bodied figures from home. But it is the greatest paradox that at a time when the corporeal self was falling apart, heroic men chose to rematerialise themselves as women and black slaves in their pursuit of performing able-bodiedness. Racial and gendered Others, though excluded from these nationalistic enterprises for their allegedly weaker constitutions, found their way onto polar shores, however distorted a representation.

A Ticket-of-Leave was also heavily saturated with homoerotic elements: the addition of a young female character called Mary Ann – a common nineteenth-century pseudonym for an effeminate male or prostitute – allowed for sexual release even as it warned men against any sexual dissent.⁹ The crew, often sharing sleeping bags and gazing at one another's chiselled forms, undoubtedly yearned for sexual contact, not having seen women for months. While it seems certain that at least some men enjoyed sexual intimacy, Mary Ann's appearance on stage suggests a level of social policing: if men were found to be bunking together in the polar night, they too could be publically labelled a "Mary Ann."

During the *Discovery* Expedition, polar blackface surfaced once again. In Chapter 4, I turn to the next and final performance during the *Discovery* Expedition, a minstrel show held later that summer. The absence of any indigenous population in Antarctica did not necessarily negate the kinds of performative colonial display among explorer society that featured during Charles Francis Hall's expedition. Rather, the inhuman continent – literally

⁹ Matt Cook, ed., *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), 124.

humanless – ensured that Scott’s sojourner-sailors were forced to perform narratives of colonialism known to them, blacking-up as the dominated to fulfil the mandate that empire building required: racial and class domination.

However, this instance of blackface also spoke heavily to class conflict during the *Discovery* Expedition. And a look at wider polar literature reveals that entrenched class lines created markedly different experiences during winters. Class, however, is not something that elitist, essentialising histories of exploration have tended to engage. Even so, from top-down procedural management of crews, to the countless trivialized deaths of sailors “for the sake of the expedition,” to the pathologising of sailors’ poor education as a cause of polar illnesses – discussed in the writing of Elisha Kent Kane in Chapter 1 – exploration societies have always been classed enterprises with an individualised, “heroic” man at the helm.

These class lines were, of course, reflected in the theatre. Though sailors took part in productions, their involvement was always sanctioned by the upper class. For most of the nineteenth century, the upper class actually put on and produced performances. It was only at the turn of the twentieth century that sailors took on most acting, allowing for greater social critique on board polar exploration ships.¹⁰

The *Discovery* sailors from the lower decks, burdened with the more mundane daily tasks of “exploration,” blacked-up to air a host of colonial and class grievances and aspirations, perversely analogising their predicament with

¹⁰ Heather Davis-Fisch reads polar theatre as a “site of discipline.” While I accept that theatre was a sanctioned entertainment that helped forestall the onset of aggression, malaise and other adverse affects, I challenge the breadth of this assumption by exposing in greater detail polar theatre’s subversive qualities. I stress that this recreational pursuit allowed for simultaneous discourses of authority and resistance between differing class factions on board expeditions. *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance: The Ghosts of the Franklin Expedition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 38.

slaves of the American South.¹¹ On the one hand, the actors and audience enjoyed the humour of the minstrel performance as a rare moment of reprieve from their debilitating climatic and social environment. On the other, this catharsis was achieved through grotesque racial mimicry, despite (or perhaps due to) the ostensible racial exclusivity of the expedition. (Much evidence suggests that working-class deckhands, whether Irish or from other British colonies, could have been cast as racial Others.¹²) In its paradoxical, analogic representations of suffering slaves, therefore, the performance can be read as a vivid critique of the race and class hierarchies on which British polar expeditions were founded.

Though scholars have convincingly shown that minstrelsy spoke to the social patterns of the society it was performed in, I consider how it shaped and was shaped by the experiences of men in spaces outside any simplistic notion of national or even imperial territory. Minstrelsy's appearance in Antarctica, which was not a freak aberration but a significant addition to the blackface canon, proved a revealing moment in the history of the Black Atlantic: a triangulation of British imperialism, American racism, and African slavery, more commonly associated with the antebellum South.¹³ In the far South Atlantic, as well as far North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean contexts, this triad highlights the global appeal and diffusion of ostensibly localised racial performances. The implications of blackface in an area devoid of local population also signified a more radical streak on a continent usually earmarked for heroic and scientific narratives.

¹¹ "Lower decks" was the local name for Royal Navy seamen, Merchant Navy seamen and civilians who were ranked lower than officer and scientist and slept in the lower decks of the *Discovery*. They were also referred to as the "mess deck."

¹² See: Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹³ The Black Atlantic is a theory of transnational, intellectual and cultural construction that suggests that black diasporas originated from the slave trade but without a communal or absolute point of origin, and that this diaspora, in its perpetual fluidity and hybridity across the Atlantic, created "stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms... within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering." Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 3.

The considerable timeframe of this thesis, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, puts my arguments in dialogue with wider histories of imperialism, masculinity and sexuality. Briefly, it calls for greater understanding of polar extremities as sites where raced and gendered differences were produced and performed by a handful of white, Western men. More than this, it suggests that such peripheries were actually, and still can be, centres for complex cultural manifestations, these performances being both exemplary and exposing of dominant discourses. Never colonial backwaters or icy wastes, the poles exacerbated and queered imperialist attitude and action even as expeditions were considered the preordained apex of such projects. Studying performance this way challenges other histories to also account for the never-benign cultural productions found in other colonial spaces. Secondly, the “hero-adventurer” was the main actor in these complex imperialist activities and, as such, he should remain considered in other studies of historically situated masculinities. The discursive construction of imperial space was inarguably complicit in maintaining regimes of heterosexual, white masculinity, and yet the “heroic” conquests of men claiming ownership and altering sovereign borders were so often paradoxically queer in content. Challenging the polar hero category speaks to other site and temporal specific studies by encouraging a kind of hyper-criticality, whether masculinities there were considered exceptional or not. Finally, this thesis calls for histories of sexuality to better heed intersectional analyses tracking the reciprocal relationships between indigeneity, class, and colonialism. It outlines a framework for understanding how sexualised and racist performances interacted with indigenous populations in the Arctic, asking that traditions usually tethered to racial dyads be understood for their import to

colonial projects removed from more “traditional” sites for performance. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to histories of sexuality that negotiate complex class configurations by uncovering how sexuality – or queer desire – can be both placated and produced by and for differing classes of men for imperial gains.

Finally, this thesis comes at a time when interest in the Arctic and Antarctic is soaring again due to anthropogenic climate change. Old colonial powers and new interests are moving in to secure increasingly available natural resources and are employing much the same nationalistic rhetoric as nineteenth- and twentieth-century expeditions. This has led to a recent resurgence of interest in historical polar exploration, and, in particular, the heroic character of the polar explorer has been subject to an intense revival.¹⁴ The centennial anniversaries of both Scott’s ill-fated expedition to the South Pole in 1913 and Ernest Shackleton’s much-vaunted expedition to Antarctica in 1914, the last in the so-called Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration, have crystallised their allegedly heroic, selfless personas as ahistorical examples of correct, patriotic masculinity. However, this thesis offers a more radical, revisionist interpretation of heroic, hyper-masculine figures by celebrating their lesser-known but equally fascinating mid-winter activities, thereby challenging their reappropriation by national and corporate actors with vested interests in exploitable polar spaces. Deconstructing the supposedly inherent hero-adventurer masculinity of previous polar enterprises, and its racist, colonialist and misogynistic tendencies, can therefore open up new understandings of Arctic and Antarctic spaces today.

¹⁴ Rebecca Farley, “‘By endurance we conquer’: Ernest Shackleton and performances of white male hegemony,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8:2 (2005): 231–54.

Thawing polar historiography

Bloom's *Gender on Ice*, written in 1993, was the first critical feminist history of polar exploration, and remains the authoritative text for any revisionist approach to Arctic and Antarctic exploration narratives. While it has influenced other scholars to complicate hyper-masculine, monolithic frontier polar space, few if any are doing so via a queer critique. This thesis specifically addresses that gap in the discourse.

In Bloom's own words, *Gender on Ice* asks "which narratives, lives, and sacrifices counted and which did not."¹⁵ By this, Bloom is referring mostly to the absence of women in polar history and to the near erasure of non-white male explorers such as African-American Matthew Henson.¹⁶ Using analysis of American explorer Robert Peary's expedition diaries, she argues that through the act of writing, such white explorers were complicit in the social construction of masculinity back home, their narratives becoming a means of "mythologizing an ideology of... white masculinity" at a time when traditional manhood, both in America and Britain, was under threat due to huge shifts in socio-economic realities.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lisa Bloom, "Arctic Spaces: Politics and Aesthetics in *True North* and *Gender on Ice*," *Journal of Contemporary African Art* 26 (2010): 32.

¹⁶ Sarah Moss makes the important but frequently overlooked point that there have, of course, been Inuit women in the Arctic for thousands of years. Many historiographies, including Bloom's, gloss over this fact. Sarah Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit: The Literature of Polar Exploration* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2006), 173.

¹⁷ Bloom, "Arctic Spaces," 33. The published diaries of explorers are strikingly similar to the written narratives of game hunters in colonial Africa and Asia in the nineteenth century. Men who caught or killed wild animals on the imperial frontier were human symbols of aggressive British conquest. Their written accounts were immensely popular back home, providing citizens with a metaphoric re-enactment of conquest and barbarianism that served to legitimise British rule over uncivilised peoples and lands. Many of the characteristics of hunter and polar-explorer texts are the same: a story with the narrator firmly in the centre; a linearity in which the hero moves chronologically from challenge to challenge; descriptions of setbacks to accentuate courage, and the final victory being solely that of the hero, with natives and/or women dropped

The harsh environmental conditions of polar spaces were apparently no place for white women, who traditionally appeared on the imperial frontier landscape to transform the wild country into civilised settlement.¹⁸ Peary's gendered process of erasure, his belittling of his wife who accompanied him on some expeditions, extended to the racialised Other. The colonial fantasy casts vast spaces of land as "blank," a tabula rasa where indigenous peoples, histories and cultures vanish.¹⁹ In his own fantasy, Peary identified polar exploration as a necessary path for human progress and "an intrinsically pure field of knowledge."²⁰ His heroic achievements, in this sense, were incommensurable with the vital efforts of the racial Other, a figure viewed as primitive, less developed, "blank." Like women, racialised Others were written out of the script to further the achievements of the white male hero, cementing a very gendered hegemony over polar spaces.²¹

The linking of the narratives of Others in *Gender on Ice* as having been downplayed or simply ignored was an important step in providing a holistic,

from the text. See: Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

¹⁸ Interestingly, Australia sent a married couple as settlers to Antarctica in the 1980s. However, their residence in their private home was short-lived; blame was resolutely placed on the woman, who allegedly spent nearly all her time crying. According to her husband, she "cannot cope with bucket baths, she wears frilly underpants, she spends too much time phoning friends, and she wishes she were back in Mooloolaba." The newspaper article detailing her trouble at the pole no doubt signalled "a cultural need to forestall the possibility of domestic colonialism and to preserve Antarctica as a masculine space of imperial mobility." Christy Collis, "The Australian Antarctic Territory: A Man's World?" *Signs* 34:3 (2009): 514–19.

¹⁹ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 2. Thomas Hietala has noted that regarding land as "blank" or empty has been a particularly American design of expansionism. Hietala suggests that Americans have long perpetuated the myth that desired lands are seen as empty and in desperate need of the presence of (American) civilisation regardless of those lives that have, in fact, been occupying them for centuries. Hietala also suggests that American empire-building was based on technological innovation, of which Robert Peary was particularly fond and used as justification for his chattel-like acquisition of Inuit. *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism & Empire, Revised Edition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 192–95.

²⁰ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 3.

²¹ Many other critical engagements with essentialised spaces and eras have pointed to the erasure of the history of the Other as a means of upholding nostalgic sentiment. Key texts include: Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing the American Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Shah Nayan, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

multi-disciplinary critique of the heroic white male explorer, a monolithic legacy previously unchallenged.²² As polar narratives re-emerge in tandem with critical discourses due to anthropogenic climate change, scholars such as Bloom are again turning their focus to the north and south, showing that contemporary discourse surrounding the poles mirrors, in so many ways, the earlier efforts of colonial enterprises.

Some of the discursive strategies we are seeing now, particularly the way the Arctic is being re-imagined by drilling proponents of the oil and gas industry as a conveniently “empty frozen wasteland of snow and ice” replay earlier imperial narratives of Arctic and Antarctic exploration in which those territories were imagined as “white” or “blank” spaces to be filled in by the very Europeans who designated them so.²³

Furthermore, where polar explorers represented Antarctica as the sublime wilderness, today’s discourse engages with the region as a place of fascinating terror that necessitates a masculinised, militarised response to climate change. In this respect, the current work of feminist scholars working in polar studies seeks to interrogate reappropriations of past narratives by national/private interests, casting polar space not as an area of female marginality, but as a site of anthropogenic change that will soon be integral to the lives of all men and women.²⁴

²² The field of feminist-postcolonial critiques of exploration and military narratives is now expansive. For analysis of twentieth-century militarisation from feminist perspectives, see: Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Catherine Lutz, ed., *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts* (London: Pluto Press, 2009). For a more specific case study of how militarisation has written certain histories out of discourse, see: John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²³ Lisa Bloom, Elena Glasberg and Laura Kay, “Introduction,” *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 7:1 (2008): 1, accessed 15 September 2014, http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/ice/intro_01.htm.

²⁴ By exposing the lives of revered explorers as more multifaceted than commonly assumed, and challenging their essentialist, de-sexualised historiography, scholars are broadening feminist

Despite breaking new ground, *Gender on Ice* lacked an explicitly queer critique, though Bloom acknowledged an incipient “gay perspective,” an understandably rudimentary labelling considering the time of publication and the nascent development of queer history as a discipline. While Bloom went some way to addressing this oversight in a later article, feminist and more traditional polar historiography has tended to ignore the myriad ways in which homosocial polar society was forced to placate if not eradicate its inherent homoeroticism.²⁵ Texts such as Robert Aldrich’s *Colonialism and Homosexuality* have shown that exploration provided the eager man with countless opportunities for same-sex contact and that the “colonies gained fame as sites of homosexual licence.”²⁶

critique first provided by Bloom. Farley exposes how present day re-enactments of Ernest Shackleton’s *Endurance* Expedition 1914–16 (enjoyed mostly by wealthy white men) directly replicate and reinforce the traditional image of the manly explorer. Shackleton’s leadership methods invoke a “strongly raced and gendered discourse of leadership” that seeks to maintain the traditional hegemony at a time when polar spaces are becoming increasingly diversified. “‘By endurance we conquer,’” 247. Elsewhere, Gisli Pálsson draws on the work of Ann Stoler, who has demonstrated that the management of intimacy in European colonies was part and parcel of imperial policies, to argue that anthropologist-explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s research on sexual maturity among Inuit girls, heavily loaded with cultural relativism, was a colonial strategy that damned Inuit girls as “by nature sexually available from an early age.” Pálsson brings to light Stefansson’s hidden Inuit wife and child. Like Peary’s reluctance to acknowledge the Other as crucial contributors to his success, Stefansson too was also unwilling or unable to recognise his collaborators, in particular women. Gisli Pálsson, “Hot Bodies in Cold Zones: Arctic Exploration,” *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 7:1 (2008): 6, accessed 15 September 2014, http://sfonline.barnard.edu/ice/palsson_01.htm; Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

²⁵ Reading Isaac Julien’s 2004 short film, *True North*, as a queer reimagining of the politics of Arctic exploration, Bloom argues that Julien’s work foregrounds the homosocial relations between Peary and his African-American companion Matthew Henson through the introduction of a black female fashion model in the Arctic, which camps the “extraordinary spectacle of the North Pole” and offers a counter-heroic ridicule of colonialism. As a result of this introduction of deliberate, exaggerated camp aesthetics, the relationship between explorers’ gendered bodies becomes an object of sexual suspicion through association. In this way, Bloom strengthens her long-standing arguments with greater critical awareness of the construction of regimes of heterosexuality through formulaic narratives of white, masculine heroism. Bloom, “Arctic Spaces,” 35–37. Jens Rydström’s *Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) is perhaps the only book to examine queer themes in polar spaces, but this is largely due to the longitudinal position of its area of focus, Sweden. Though a fascinating study, it pays little attention to climatic factors as a facilitator of desire.

²⁶ Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 1. There are, however, many queer critiques of military environments. See: Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Thomas Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994); Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity,” 149–79; Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gender Construction and*

Aldrich notes the widespread ease with which white men had access to darker bodies across the world, yet does not make a conceptual link between these colonial realities and polar spaces.

The lack of any substantive analysis of polar drag in histories of expeditions exemplifies this oversight.²⁷ Despite some dramaturgical research into the startlingly vivid descriptions of men dressed as women in the Arctic and Antarctic found in journals, the farcical activities of polar explorers have failed to achieve extended notice.²⁸ Where briefly mentioned, cross-dressing has been rationalised within the conventions of late-nineteenth-century normativity and the exigencies of the psychosocial well-being of the crew. As a result, its queerer implications have been neglected.

The expunging of cross-dressers from popular histories is nothing new, especially in romanticised “frontier” cultures. Peter Boag has shown that in the nineteenth-century American West, cross-dressers were a thriving, functionally central part of the social landscape, but have since been forgotten because men dressed as women were incongruent with America’s cultural infatuation with the

Political Order at the Time of the European Conquest of the Americas (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

²⁷ Histories of the *Discovery* Expedition only touch upon the well-documented cross-dressing and blackface that took place in winter. Critical analysis, if present, is given in a sentence or two at most. See: T. Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice: Robert Falcon Scott’s First Antarctic Expedition* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Ranulph Fiennes, *Captain Scott* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003); Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott’s Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Edward Larson, *An Empire of Ice: Scott, Shackleton, and the Heroic Age of Antarctic Science* (London: Yale University Press, 2011); D. Yelverton, *Antarctica Unveiled: Scott’s First Expedition and the Quest for the Unknown Continent* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).

²⁸ There have been some dramaturgical studies of polar cross-dressing. The most recent is the book-length monograph by Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*. Though Davis-Fisch reads many of the same performances as this thesis, her goals are different: Davis-Fisch makes the claim that material history is not the only method of remembering, contending that studying performances reveals how things were experienced as opposed to how they “were.” Other notable studies include an excellent piece of performance studies analysis by Mike Pearson, “‘No Joke in Petticoats’: British Polar Exhibitions and Their Theatrical Presentations,” *The Drama Review* 48:1 (2004): 44–59; Elizabeth Leane, “Antarctic Theatricals: The Frozen Farce of Scott’s First Expedition,” *Theatre Notebook* 57:3 (2003): 143–57; Mary Isbell, “(P)laying off Old Ironsides and the Old Wagon: Melville’s Depiction of Shipboard Theatricals in *White-Jacket*,” *A Journal of Melville Studies* 15 (2013): 6–30.

frontier, memorialised as a manly, escapist space.²⁹ Their “effeminacy and sexuality ran diametrically counter to what the frontier and the American West symbolized already at the end of the nineteenth century.”³⁰ Both the incommensurability of the figure and the landscape, and the rapidly growing anxiety over sexual perversion borne out of urban modernity, led to the erasure of their history, a particularly shocking response when considering the vast number of cross-dresser lives that Boag uncovered during his extensive research: only a correspondingly immense amount of cultural forgetting could have silenced such a vibrant and varied world of transvestites, performers, and persons in disguise.³¹

Boag suggests, then, that locating cross-dressers within their material realities speaks to the flux of normativity both in the past and in the present

²⁹ Boag’s work is influenced by Marjorie Garber. Garber argues that female-to-male cross-dressing has often been explained using a “progress narrative.” Rather than engage the complex meanings of cross-dressing, many historians have normalised female-to-male cross-dressing by rationalising it as a means to an end, often within an overarching personal development narrative, or, as Garber herself puts it, “by interpreting it in the register of socio-economic necessity.” *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2011), 69. American industrialisation at the close of the nineteenth century resulted in huge changes in society: women’s growing emancipation, the rise of the blue-collar worker and economic depression all served to trouble that familiar sense of frontier masculinity on which the American nation was allegedly founded. After historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier officially “closed” in 1893, modern Americans began to look nostalgically at the West, revelling in a selective history of the heyday of cowboys, Indians and lone-wolf heroes. As masculinity became threatened due to the changes in society described, there was a push, led in part by figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Eugen Sandow and Walt Whitman, to reclaim a former sense of manly composure away from modernity’s effeminising effects. Many of the efforts were physical: bodybuilding and adventure/exploration narratives thrived, as did activity in the frontier wild, and yet these scenarios became hotbeds for homoeroticism. Richard Slotkin is one of many historians who address this sense of frontier nostalgia; see: *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

³⁰ Boag, *Re-Dressing the American Frontier*, 6.

³¹ A similar historical silencing can be found in the case of transients in the western regions of the United States and Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. Shah writes: “...in the second half of the twentieth century, policy makers and scholars have erased the history of transient migrants to promote national assimilation narratives that emphasize nuclear family settlement.” Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 2. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that historical silencing happens at four crucial moments: the moment sources are created; the moment they are assembled into archives; the moment they are retrieved and narrativised; and the moment of retrospective significance or the production of history. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

discourse that has sought to erase them.³² Finding the line of normativity can be difficult: it constantly moves across time and space, and, moreover, historians with vested interests can shift it using various strategies, be they silencing, racialising or progress narratives.

Allan Bérubé has shown that American GI drag during World War Two was an endorsed method of boosting morale that allowed most soldiers to affirm their heterosexuality publicly, while others covertly pursued their homosexuality. His exposé of “the military’s own golden age of female impersonation” demonstrates how certain behaviours can be rendered as acceptable by discourses of the time; that drag’s importance to the war effort subsequently has been downplayed or overlooked is evidence of more recent historical discriminations that Bérubé, like Boag, attempts to expose.³³

Where cross-dressing began as a socially constructed response to the intensely homosocial military environment in World War Two, later attempts to rationalise it this way fell flat due to the increasing female presence in the army towards the end of the war. The rapid change in attitude attests to the fluidity of acceptance, which was reactionary to other social dislocations. But even within this endorsed drag practice, men dressed as women were forced to walk a very thin line between presenting believable female characters and avoiding camp

³² Jean Howard, in her study of female-to-male cross-dressers in early modern England, adequately addresses the issue of locating normativity when she writes, “As with any social practice, its meaning [cross-dressing] varied with the circumstances of its occurrence, with the particulars of the institutional or cultural sites of its enactment, and with the class position of the transgressors.” Howard, however, goes on to state succinctly that despite the multiple manifestations of cross-dressing, they still form “an interlocking grid through which we can read aspects of class and gender struggle.” “Cross-Dressing, the Theater, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England,” in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993), 20.

³³ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 68, 95.

representations, which sometimes elicited anger from male spectators.³⁴ In presenting believable females, some homosexual men found empowerment in their cross-dressing performances – a non-normative aspect in an increasingly complex site of contestation.³⁵ Cross-dressing, therefore, can be situated within

³⁴ Bérubé writes: “Whenever drag performances became explicitly homosexual and undermined the audience’s heterosexual assumptions – when performers impersonated queers or seemed queer themselves – then spectators sometimes became offended and hostile.” *Coming Out under Fire*, 72.

³⁵ As well as empowerment, drag can also act as a powerful protest against existing power structures. Drag provides a “category of crisis.” Crisis because the cross-dresser is at a border-crossing between traditional notions of man and woman, blurring boundaries, putting them into question or erasing them altogether; he is, to borrow Garber’s phrasing, a “mechanism of displacement.” Garber, *Vested Interests*, 32, 16. (The category of crisis can also refer to racial and class displacement as well. Male-to-female cross-dressing in the American West became associated with non-white races in order to leave pristine the white history of the frontier, thereby merging racial and gender anxiety over the Other.) This category of crisis is a powerful form of social protest, especially within queer communities that seek to decentre hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. Consequently, many queer scholarly engagements with cross-dressing have done so through the study of drag performers and the politics of their performance. Drag queens personify a “complex interplay, slippage, and parodic recontextualization of gender markers and gender categories.” Garber, *Vested Interests*, 134. On stage and in their own way, drag queens articulate so many of the paradoxes of gender and sexuality that theoreticians have described on page.

Anthropologist Esther Newton provided a structural analysis of how drag queens were able to question or deconstruct gender roles. Newton observed that performers would create oppositional play between “appearance,” the adoption of a female sartorial system, and “essence,” the male underneath the clothes. Breaking the illusion of femininity on stage, by say, revealing a flat chest or deep voice, exposed the slipperiness of the dichotomisation of male–female on multiple levels: not only was a drag queen a man rematerialised as a woman, he was also able to revert back to his “essence” at will. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 101. Newton showed therefore that the performance of drag necessitated a double reading of gender and laid the foundations for gender theorists to come, most notably Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*.

Judith Butler used *Mother Camp* as inspiration for her own theoretical work on gender. Butler argues that gender is an imitation for which there is no original; in other words, there is no ideal form to which a gender can subscribe as much as it tries. Therefore, a heterosexualised gender is “always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself – *and failing* [author’s emphasis].” Butler has written a great deal on the performativity required of this continual cycle of imitation and fail. A distinction must be drawn, however, between gender performativity (Butler’s concept) and gender performance (sartorial play). Though Butler states that it was when reading *Mother Camp* that she realised that there is “no ‘proper’ gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another,” and that “drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done,” her work does not claim that drag can dismantle gender identity, for the shock of drag is in the shared knowledge that the person behind the mask is another gender. Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 312–13.

Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor’s classic study of drag queens at the *801 Cabaret* develops the understanding of the political nature of drag. Rupp and Taylor focus on the strategic collective action of drag shows and their ability to construct and affirm identity. Many men, some queer some not, would be invited inside the *801 Cabaret* to witness drag as a protest event that expressed dissent from normative gender and sexuality constructs. Through racy audience participation, the drag queens were in fact inviting “individual participation in collective action

multiple discourses of permissibility and transgression, its slippery nature requiring that we perform multiple readings of specific scenarios in specific eras, paying attention to the contextual backgrounds against which it can play.³⁶

This thesis sits neatly at the intersections of Bloom, Boag and Bérubé. It redresses the historical forgetting of polar drag similar to the forgetting critiqued by Boag and Bérubé in their studies of cross-dressers in other masculinised and militarised spaces. This performative transgenderism – and its often amnesiac histories – have been the product of immense cultural work both positive and negative: where American transvestites and GI drag have largely been erased, polar explorers have been continually augmented in an aura of brave, heroic masculinity that renders cross-dressing as an occasional, insignificant pastime. Locating explorers' cross-dressing tendencies, however, exposes their subjectivities as more multifaceted than commonly assumed. Furthermore, the study of polar performance also works to enrich the history of drag. I argue in a similar vein to Boag that cross-dressers embody unstable identities that have changed throughout history. Unlike the fastidiously delineated sexual identities of hetero/homosexuality, cross-dressers can exist across multiple boundaries, complicating and mimicking them at will. These boundaries can be geographic

by building solidarity and oppositional consciousness." *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 215. In doing so, the queens were broadening the meaning of community by linking diverse audience members to the performer and to each other. Likewise, in witnessing a man dressed as a woman, the audience were invited to reflect on their own internal femininity in unison, underscoring the communal aspect of this identity (re)construction. All this said, Rupp and Taylor insist that drag is still entertainment; it is above all a *performance* of protest, and its fun nature serves to widen the audience hearing its message. The appeal of drag may lie in its campness. Camp, Susan Sontag suggests, is the love of artifice; it contradicts nature or effaces it altogether. "Notes on Camp," *Partisan Review* 31 (1964).

³⁶ For another example on the very fine line between normativity and transgression and cross-dressing practice, see the judicial case of Ernest Boulton in 1871. Boulton was accused of the catch-all crime of sodomy for his public appearance in drag. Boulton's defence rested on his use of women's clothing for *theatrical* performance, which, according to his lawyers, caused no offence whatsoever. Laurence Senelick, "Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural origins of glamour drag and male impersonation on the nineteenth-century stage," in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993), 87.

too: in uncovering racy cross-dressing at the poles, I show that this phenomenon can materialise at myriad locations, even those as drastic as the Arctic and Antarctic. While I therefore suggest that cross-dressing was functionally crucial to exploration, I also approach it as a specific locus of transgender history very much worth celebrating.

Bringing Bloom, Bérubé and Boag into dialogue allows me to speak to wider histories of imperialism, masculinity and sexuality, as already discussed. But these three historians, and my own thesis, are heavily influenced by the work of theorists such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Mikhail Bakhtin, who are referenced, though not directly discussed, throughout this work. It is not my intention to pass comment and criticism on these renowned theorists; those wanting an erudite discussion on the finer details of Butler's theories should look elsewhere. While I acknowledge their immense influence, I do so through the work of other, more thematically related historically specific studies, such as Bloom and Boag. I use theorists such as Bakhtin where appropriate to foreground more context-specific arguments, though I seldom pause on theories themselves; I use them as instruments and not objects of analysis. It is my intention, rather, to write a rich, textured ethnography of polar exploration that is firmly and proudly grounded in material reality. I wish to provide a humanised history of exploration through performance, introducing multiplicity to polar history and therefore the poles themselves, which in so many ways are discursively constructed through writing. Through this ethnography, I aim to perpetuate a polar tradition of fine narration, to provide a story that will be told again.

Furthermore, though there has been a sharp increase in recent feminist work on the Arctic and Antarctic, these long-fetishised spaces still seem

monolithic in analysis. Where Bloom, Boag, and others have argued that the discursive construction of colonial space is complicit in maintaining regimes of heterosexual masculinity, I would suggest that cultural formations produced as a result of aggressive, imperial transgression into polar space also have aesthetic/radical dimensions that interrogate gendered ideologies as well as diversify polar history. I draw environmental factors into this discourse: scholars have overlooked how climatic temperatures can eroticise individuated and aggregated bodies and how this sexualisation is placated through drama. Where historians of gender and sexuality have argued that sexuality is a social construct that must be addressed within its own specific time and space – that is, that sexuality should not collapsed into a transhistorical, essentialised concept – I argue that climatic environment can also be viewed as a kind of temporal spatiality that demands site-specific analysis, much as, say, the study of the nineteenth century demands that we forego our modern-day assumptions about homosexuality.³⁷ In other words, physical intimacy produced as a result of lower (or higher) temperatures provides a critique of theories of sexuality; it suggests that same-sex contact – intimate, homoeroticised, or sexual – can be regarded as situational phenomenon due to environmental conditions rather than the product of innate dispositions within individuals.

Jim Crow on snow

In the nineteenth century, blackface minstrelsy was a phenomenally popular form of entertainment in America and Britain that naturalised the

³⁷ See: David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

material realities of slavery and racial subordination. Both back home and in polar space, however, there were, as Eric Lott puts it, “contradictory impulses at work.”³⁸ These impulses betrayed an appreciation of, or at least a fascination with, darker bodies at a time when American national identity was laying its foundations on the back of black labour and Indian land, and British imperialism subjugated and dominated the racial Other. A closer examination of racial performances also reveals that racial Others are frequently and paradoxically regarded as being part of the make-up of national identity, belonging to the interior despite their Otherness, despite low socio-economic standing, as suggested by the singing of plantation songs during the first American expedition to the Arctic, detailed in in Chapter 1.

Blackface in nineteenth century America was among the first and most popular forms of mass culture, reaching a zenith in the Jacksonian period of expansion in the 1840s. Though considered the historical property of America, early forms of blackface can be located in early modern Europe. Michael Rogin has shown that Queen Anne, wife of James I, blacked-up in court in the seventeenth century, her curiosity to try on a black mask born out of “the material and psychological investment in these peoples being incorporated into the capitalist world system.”³⁹ This incorporation, obviously, was through the African slave trade, well established by 1600. The curiosity about and exploitation of black people would continue to exist side by side, following the trajectory of slavery to the Americas.

³⁸ Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 4.

³⁹ Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 19. Rogin’s overall argument is that blackface served as a rite of passage for Jewish immigrants to America. By donning cork, Jewish performers aligned their ethnicity as opposed to black, and subsequently they could assimilate into the newly forming “white” national identity.

In *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Eric Lott argues that, two centuries later in America, blackface was a means of assuring white supremacy by making the material relations of slavery seem “amusing, right, and natural.” Blackface, and in particular minstrelsy, worked to propagate racialised social constructs, in particular acting as a cultural marker of interaction between the two races, making humorous the gross realities of slavery.⁴⁰ This rationalisation of slavery was a necessary coping mechanism for the paradoxes at the heart of new American national identities.⁴¹

Lott and Rogin’s works on blackface minstrelsy align through their mutual assertion that the performance tradition betrays a fascination with blackness and the black body. Lott argues that minstrelsy was the manifestation of the desire to try on blackness, born less of absolute white authority, though this was certainly part of it, and more of “panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure.”⁴² Minstrel performers could barely keep repressed the interest they had in black

⁴⁰ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 3, 6.

⁴¹ The nation had been founded on libertarian ideologies, yet was being constructed on the labour of enslaved people of colour. Theodore Allen has shown that the American “white race” was a socially constructed category, formed to align white labourers with the white ruling plantation class as a method of social control over black, lifelong bondage labourers. Allen argues that rather than from innate, primordial racism, oppression of black people was born out of a ruling-class desire to weaken labourer solidarity after the Bacon Rebellion. *The Invention of the White Race: Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 2012), 248–49.

⁴² Lott, *Love & Theft*, 7. Rogin criticises Lott, in arguing for contradictory impulses, for dwelling insufficiently on the “grotesque, demeaning, animalistic blackface mask.” That is, in arguing for the enthusiasm for black practices, Lott has not paid justice to its overwhelmingly racist aspects. *Blackface, White Noise*, 37. The contradictory impulses at work during the minstrel show are also discernable in racial performances of Native Americans by white Americans. In the nineteenth century, Americans were fixated on defining themselves as a nation. While blackness paradoxically became a precondition for the establishment of the American white race, Philip Deloria argues that Native Americans were also part of American oppositional racial obsession. By dressing up as Indians, Americans found a new way to forge identity, one that was both European and aboriginal, but also neither. Americans saw Indians, though problematic, as within the borders of their own national identity, separating them from Europeans. Furthermore, Americans have long put on Indian costume and make-up for rebellious purposes due to the state of liminality produced through the act of dressing-up. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Deloria invokes the work of drama theorist Victor Turner, who argues that liminal experience allows for the acting out conflicting impulses through its temporary existence between regulated social spaces. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

cultural practices. Though grossly distorted, the songs of black slave populations appropriated by white performers were a “mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation.”⁴³ Brock Thompson has described this conflicted relationship to black cultural practices, appropriated and distorted, as an “intrusive gaze of fascination into a subculture that was forbidden and largely inaccessible to whites.”⁴⁴

The “panic” that Lott describes originated from the proximity of black populations, which required intimate if hierarchical contact between black and white people on a daily basis. Rogin shows that though society was rigidly delineated in material terms between white and blacks, it developed culturally from the transgressions of those very same stratifications. Though there was widespread hysteria over the mixing of black and white bodily fluids, white men would regularly enter “in sexual and theatrical invasion, the black bodies they had consigned to physicalized inferiority.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Lott argues that minstrelsy was actually produced in more egalitarian places of mixing between labouring whites and free blacks, such as working-class areas in northern cities. To assume that blackface was the product of contact *between* the races is an

⁴³ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 6. Important to consider is how blackface practises, though heavily distorted, were appropriated from black culture. Lawrence Levine has shown how famous performer Thomas D. Rice made minstrel stage hits out of black songs sung on plantations. These songs would be performed on stage around the South and then, paradoxically, appropriated by slaves and reintegrated back into black tradition. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 192. A testament to the fluidity of performance, this appropriation and reappropriation ultimately resulted in a shared stock of folk songs among all inhabitants of America. This circular process is persuasive evidence that blackface was in dialogue with actual black practices, and that it saw worth in them, though relations of power uniformly left black people unable to “regain and retain self-expression.” Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 33. Rogin argues that though African-Americans had an expressive culture that whites were drawn to copy, whites only did so safely behind the minstrel mask. Through this defence mechanism, they also had the ability to turn any appropriation back onto the figure being mocked. For example, copies of black practices were often changed so that they appeared as black efforts to imitate whites; these were then ridiculed accordingly.

⁴⁴ Brock Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010), 28.

⁴⁵ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 25.

inversion, though not negation, of the idea that blackface was a one-way method of ridicule and social control.

Sexual desire constituted a prominent part of this fascination with the black body, which was widely considered to be hyper-sexualised, and punished accordingly within a wider strategy of oppression.⁴⁶ White society in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was fixated with the alleged sexual potency of the black male (who in his native form was supposedly bereft of control over his passions) and his proximity to that traditional cradle of civilisation, white women. Minstrelsy, Lott argues, served the function of “invoking the black male body as a powerful cultural sign of sexuality.”⁴⁷ Though this sexuality was considered menacing and degenerate, Lott suggests that fears could not be distinguished from fantasies, or envy, of the black male penis. This fixation with the phallus was reflected in the production of blackface: there is evidence to suggest that performers and audience enjoyed the homoeroticism that came with all-male performing groups, which regularly featured “wenches” (black female characters) played by effeminate, sexually

⁴⁶ John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 36–37, 216–17. A recent article has argued that public narratives of voodoo were also instrumental to white supremacy in the South. As whites responded to slavery, emancipation and the threat of black citizenship, voodoo performances, described in print, “evinced for white publics the primitive, oppositional blackness on which their own racial identities relies; these narratives demonstrated the persistent threat of black and female rebellion.” The sensationalist “fetish and demon worship, animal sacrifice, cannibalism, nudity, drumming, sexual promiscuity, and interracial ‘orgies’” reported in public narratives legitimised segregation in a volatile time of hysteria over miscegenation and protecting white womanhood. Michelle Gordon, “‘Midnight Scenes and Orgies’: Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy,” in *American Quarterly* 64:4 (2012): 769.

⁴⁷ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 118. Diana Paulin has shown that miscegenation was tracked, regulated, and prohibited in literature and drama from the end of the Civil War to World War One. She suggests, in a very Foucauldian vein, that the highly visible staging of miscegenation in fiction was due to an obsessive preoccupation with these unnatural unions. Paulin argues the overexposure of depictions of interracial unions, however, served to reproduce what she terms the “black-white dyad” in cultural narratives of U.S. nation formation. Diana Paulin, *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), x.

ambiguous men.⁴⁸ Rogin has noted that there was a fetish-like “trying-on” of black inferiority in early blackface; white men could temporarily, and in the sanctioned space of theatre, submit themselves to the white colonial master: “The masque turned into the desire to be illuminated by and for the white male gaze.”⁴⁹ However, there was a tension here between the effeminate white male actor playing the black female and the identification of black manhood as a sign of “potent male heterosexuality,” thereby deflecting any homosexual desire.⁵⁰

There is a surprising dearth of comparative cross-cultural scholarship on blackface abroad and on representations of black culture more generally. As compared to the United States, Britain had smaller populations of African descent within its home borders; there may have seemed little need for an art form that could act as a cultural mediator between black enslavement and white supremacy. However, according to cultural analyst Michael Pickering, author of the first and only full-length critical study of British minstrelsy, minstrel acts, troupes and shows spread rapidly throughout Britain from as early as the 1830s. Particularly popular were nostalgic shows about Southern plantation life, which Pickering sees as a British curiosity about life in the New World, of which the “Negro” character and culture were prominent. Scholar J. Batton shares the view that pseudo-ethnographic curiosity drove many performances, pointing to Charles Matthew, an entertainer who studied “negro dialect and material” in America and brought it back to England as entertainment.⁵¹ Clearly, “black”

⁴⁸ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 54. Wench roles became a specialty within minstrelsy. The role depicted a young “mulatto” woman in a refined manner and required a high-pitched voice and gentility to play. Senelick, “Boys and Girls Together,” 89. For more on the theoretical links between blackface and cross-dressing, see Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 30–35.

⁴⁹ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 20.

⁵⁰ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 54.

⁵¹ J. Bratton, “English Ethiopians: British Audiences and Black-Face Acts, 1835-1865,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981): 131.

culture was viewed as a defining aspect of post-Revolutionary American life. Black people, in other words, were considered essential to, even as they were marginalised or subsumed within, that (white) national identity, despite the repeated repression of their own culture. Obviously, also, British “curiosity” about African-American slave culture distanced middle-class audiences from the historical realities of black slavery in the British Isles, not to mention the British Empire’s foundational role in the transatlantic slave trade.

The British offshoot of blackface soon developed as a distinctive counterpart. As is elaborated in Chapter 4, the commonplace malapropisms of American minstrelsy were assimilated and overridden by particularly English forms of comic language, most notably the pun, which became one of the most popular features of a minstrel show. Most important was the reduction of rawer, rougher, bawdier aspects of blackface in favour of a seemingly more refined, sentimental approach that drew upon a heterogeneous selection of musical styles.⁵² British minstrels sang in suits supported by orchestras, leaving the vulgarity that accompanied shows in taverns and docks firmly behind, again distancing middle-class audiences from the cruelties of slavery and sublimating imperial violence in the service of romantic representations. This change in style and form was matched by a growing sense of regret at the situation of the ragged plantation slave, a melancholic yet noble sufferer.⁵³

This sentimentality, Bratton suggests, was born out of a vague sympathy for slaves in British audiences, despite the huge contradictions of the British slave trade, as already vividly imaged by Queen Anne’s supremacist desire to try

⁵² Michael Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” *Popular Music* 16 (1997): 191.

⁵³ Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 18, 20.

on the black mask.⁵⁴ Ultimately, there were multiple contradictory discourses at work. At a time when Victorian sensibilities regarded racial subordination as justifiable based on the weak material and economic achievements of supposedly inferior societies, blackface surfaced as a uniform, an exaggerated identity for those who languished at the bottom of racial hierarchies. This fabricated identity literally brought to the front of the stage a legitimisation for British imperial authority. Furthermore, due to anxieties about the mobility of non-white peoples, whether the forced migrations of slavery or the economic peregrinations of postcolonial destitution, blackface constituted an attempt to reassert white British identity within home borders: “The blackface mask and all it connoted was defined against a central and directive conception of the uniqueness of British, and, more specifically, English culture and identity... In their very opposition to that identity, blackface representation contributed significantly to a re-constitution of the national subject.”⁵⁵

The scant literature on British formations of blackface, considered against its vast popularity, is surprising. However, scholarship on blackface outside of any “home” territory is virtually non-existent. The texts mentioned so far do not consider blackface formations in colonial spaces, thereby overlooking how this malleable performance tradition could speak to social patterns found outside national borders. Furthermore, Lott, Rogin and Pickering discuss mostly hegemonic forms of blackface minstrelsy, that is, commercialised forms of the performance tradition found in urban spaces with dedicated theatrical venues. In his controversial monograph on minstrelsy, William Mahar demonstrates that minstrel performers recognised that they operated in a market-driven economy

⁵⁴ Bratton, “English Ethiopians,” 133.

⁵⁵ Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 192–93.

and altered the content of their bills to appeal to different and emerging audiences.⁵⁶ In fact, Mahar goes so far as to argue that nineteenth-century minstrelsy reflected less about the race of its onstage characters and more about the gender and class of its audience members. He argues that race, though important, was more of a masking device for commercial musicians to make social critiques about whites, all the time with profit in mind.⁵⁷

This thesis intervenes by interrogating the hegemony of blackface in the metropole by highlighting unexamined instances of blackface abroad, a crucial oversight in the literature. Imperial amateur blackface was decoupled from most financial concerns. That is, audiences usually did not purchase tickets, performers were not paid, and the productions were underwritten by the particular expedition and the larger imperial project. Thus, this distinctive variety of overseas minstrelsy was better able to speak to immediate social (often shipboard) concerns, as well as to the cross-cultural anxieties of an imperial outpost, without having to prioritise content to improve its monetary success. The scholarly over-reliance on commercialised minstrelsy is discussed in Chapter 2, which highlights amateur blackface as a widespread phenomenon that could materialise somewhere as “peripheral” as the Arctic. I also consider how amateur blackface operated in colonial sites to become an even more racially fraught cultural practice – a nexus of power in confrontations with local populations, namely indigenous Inuit. Colonisers, both upper class and lower,

⁵⁶ William Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 27.

⁵⁷ Mahar’s argument is simply overstated; it downplays the ridiculing, disparaging and grotesquely offensive nature of the minstrel show in its pursuit of demonstrating that “racial disparagement, however prominently it figures as a humorous device and as a means of social control, was *not* [author’s emphasis] the only function of the minstrel show.” *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 40. While Mahar does demonstrate that sketches in shows rarely dealt directly with race, he overlooks the fact that race was still uniformly emphasised even when it was the underlying theme. In other words, racial ridicule saturated every aspect of shows even if not directly verbalised.

exploited popular notions of black bodies as a means of racial policing in imperial territories. This is also true in Antarctica, where Scott's sailors used the power assigned to an imagined black body as a means to reaffirm colonial supremacy among an ailing white audience, as discussed in Chapter 4. As such, I would like to suggest that Lott's widely recognised description of white "love and theft" of black cultural practices can be updated to read love, theft *and exploitation*.

Methodology

In many ways, the history of nineteenth-century affection between men has been neglected when compared to its late-twentieth-century counterpart. There is a dearth of evidence of genital-to-genital contact, the period's criminalised act and today's hallowed evidence of intercourse. Further, certain historical periods, popular in the public imagination or important to the nation, remain over-essentialised and under-interrogated. These two phenomena have resulted in a highly charged touchiness over locating male-male intimacy in historical accounts. These problems are best exemplified by the work of historian Martin Duberman, who found perhaps the most explicit evidence of same-sex intercourse in an 1826 letter from one man to another, which described the "extravagant delight of poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole – the exquisite touches of which I have had the honor of feeling."⁵⁸ The power of these words was matched by the ferocity of resistance

⁵⁸ Thomas Withers to James Hammond, 24 September 1826, Hammond Papers, South Carolina Library, Columbia, South Carolina, cited in Martin Duberman, "'Writhing Bedfellows' in Antebellum South Carolina: Historical Interpretation and the Politics of Evidence," in *Carryin'*

with which archivists attempted to stop Duberman's access: only after multiple letters and the threat of legal action did Duberman secure and publish the document.

Stories such as these – of access denied, of histories whitewashed – are common. There has been an incorrect yet stubborn perception that to identify queerness in the past is to somehow dirty the legacy of other eras. Similarly, critical as opposed to celebratory histories of polar exploration are few and far between. Bloom's *Gender on Ice*, though written in 1993, has remained one of the only feminist monographs on the topic; though I can only offer it as anecdotal evidence, the book has caused much upset among descendants of polar explorers and the wider polar historiography establishment, who belong to the same high-status educated class.

The fact that Bloom's book is the only critical polar history suggests, then, that polar exploration is a topic ripe for critical picking and that polar farce, in particular, is a topic none other has fully addressed. Thankfully, descriptions of polar farce are prevalent in nearly every Western polar expedition diary from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, providing a generous pool of sources for the historian. Common sense limitations on thesis size and focus disallow mention of every expedition featuring farce. Therefore, I selected particular expeditions for analysis for their historical importance, their exemplary descriptions and due to the diverse selection of diaries on offer in a given expedition.

For example, the expeditions of William Edward Parry are simply too important to ignore, being the first of their kind and the first to feature polar farce

On in the Lesbian and Gay South, ed. John Howard (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 15.

in an official, organised way. Parry's expeditions were considered the genesis of many polar traditions, so I felt compelled to include his narrative to show this origin and its long-lasting effect. Other expeditions appealed for their rich descriptions, such as Horatio Austin's rescue expedition, chronicled by Clements Markham. Markham's narrative is full of detail on the theatre, be it set design or reproduced scripts, and furthermore, its enthusiastic, camp tone matches the excessiveness of the productions it describes. This confluence of performance and written narrative is useful for attempting a textured ethnography of polar performance. Charles Francis Hall's narrative of his expedition features a great amount of colonial interaction with indigenous populations. His diary, and the night of blackface it describes, represented the apex of coloniser-Inuit relations and therefore could not be ignored for its contributions to the canon and to racist, imperialist discourse. Finally, I chose the *Discovery* Expedition due to the vast amount of detailed descriptions of its performances produced by differing individuals. A range of diaries, from officer, scientist to sailor, made it possible to read the expedition through its understudied multiplicity: I have been able to position the narrative of Scott against those of the lower decks, and in turn, construct a more heterogeneous, though still problematic, account of certain theatrical nights. Taken together, these varied considerations behind my selection of sources result in a detailed, developed account of polar farce. A microscopic, intimate focus on certain expeditions allowed me to construct a wider history of this tradition while retaining its human element.

Nevertheless, there are important methodological difficulties to consider, especially as they relate to using diaries as sources. Parry's first expedition, as recorded in the first polar-exploration narrative analysed in this thesis in Chapter

1, evidences the vexed archival quandaries that have delimited this type of research. After returning home from a relatively successful expedition in search of the Northwest Passage in 1820, Parry was required by the British Admiralty to submit any and all written accounts of the expedition, retaining no copies. For all literate men, this was a condition of joining naval expeditions at the time. The sole exception was Parry himself, who retained and subsequently published his own journals.⁵⁹ Parry wrote his journals from a position of authority and therefore his voice is established as the sole voice of the expedition: natural, accurate and in no need of question. This, of course, diminishes the multiplicity of classed experience found during the expedition. The admiralty's one-journal policy effectively silenced all other voices from the two-year period, no insignificant matter considering Parry's dubious assertion that all was pleasant and amicable during their winter stay on ice. Furthermore, as will be shown, Parry was pedantically on guard against scurvy, thought to indicate the onset of same-sex desire. Sodomy had plagued the admiralty earlier in the decade, thus begging the question: was their silencing of other voices an attempt to suppress further evidence of same-sex affairs in the ranks?

The reification of one narrative and the removal of all others are considerable problems. My primary sources have been, for the most part, official, published accounts of expeditions written by upper-class elite men keen to make a name for themselves in the manly testing ground of the Arctic and Antarctic. These are simply the most accessible sources on polar expedition, and though they are problematic, they represent a high quality archive. However, it is more than likely that dissent among the ranks was heavily downplayed to further the

⁵⁹ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 60.

allegedly successful leadership style of the men in charge as well as the expedition's fame. Any instances of same-sex action could be effectively expunged from history, before or after they were documented on the "official" page.

To overcome this, I take a highly critical approach to reading official narratives, and where possible, I have diversified my sources using unpublished journals held in archives.⁶⁰ For example, in the Charles Francis Hall expedition, I used his private journals to considerable effect, finding evidence of sexualisation of Inuit that was not present in his published account, a telling omission. In many respects however, published diaries tend to represent slightly edited versions of private journals, there being little difference between the two. Furthermore, I offset the weight of officer's expedition diaries by using newspapers printed on board where possible and secondary literature, each imperfect but useful when used in tandem. I have relatively ignored official reports, which read as dry and uninformative, beyond, say, providing dates of theatricals.

I read against the grain of explorer-narrators such as Parry, who perpetually took credit for all successful decisions, by creatively imagining, often with scepticism, the context of diary production. For example, it is possible to pause at Parry's questionable statements regarding effective decision-making – which firmly placed his authoritative subjectivity at the centre of the narrative – and open them up for discussion. They can become, paradoxically, rich mines for historical analysis, in that their flagrant self-promotion renders the accounts suspect and worthy of scrutiny, exposing the gendered entitlements, raced

⁶⁰ My research has benefitted immensely from the archive at the Scott Polar Research Institute at the University of Cambridge, which holds every published and unpublished diary from the *Discovery* Expedition. The library at the Institute furthermore holds every polar expedition diary, either in published or facsimile format.

assumptions, and classed nature of exploration. Therefore, to read against the grain is to perform a kind of “queer” reading, to question that which is presented as normative, to consider diversity of experience and subjectivity and their (mis)representation, to adopt a hermeneutics of suspicion aimed at narratives that perpetuate hegemonic gendered and classed narratives.

Furthermore, celebratory polar historiography has tended to aggregate polar explorers into one monolithic category of heroic leader, forgetting or overlooking the fact that expeditionary forces vastly differed in their composition – that sailors, scientists and officers, among others, had varied experiences of the poles. One of the key aims of this project has been to disaggregate expeditions, though the voicelessness of the lower decks has been exceedingly problematic. Whereas Parry and other expedition leaders taught sailors to read and write during winter, these working-class shipmates remained largely illiterate over the expeditions considered in this thesis. This has added to the historical bias towards men in charge and exacerbated a “poverty of understanding” of the experience of others.⁶¹ As shown throughout, working-class sailors were a crucial component of expedition labour, suffering and working at least as much, if not more, than the men in charge, yet going underappreciated.

Therefore, to overcome this limitation, I have uncovered and pointed out the agency of sailors in different ways. In Chapter 2, for instance, I show that whalers’ enjoyment of amateur blackface was one way in which colonial, racist sentiment was performed and perpetuated by working-class groups in contact with local Inuit. I juxtapose this against the study of top-down decisions by governing elites, which have remained at the centre of scholarly enquiry. I also

⁶¹ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, xxiv.

read performances at the poles as classed critiques. Though polar theatre was a recreational form sanctioned by the captain and performed and produced mostly by officers in the British Navy, it is still possible to read shades of dissent in plots and production. This is especially true of American forms, which were solely arranged by sailors. By reading theatre creatively, especially blackface performances, it has been possible to locate working-class agency on the stage, thereby exposing differing representations of polar experience.

Inuit subjectivity and agency have been the hardest to uncover, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Polar indigenous populations did not leave written records before the twentieth century, so all documentation of Inuit interaction, society and culture have been related through the eyes of supremacist, elitist explorers. However, by reading examples of Inuit agency through, for example, their self-consciously “offensive” performative acts of excessive “barbarity,” it has been possible to locate Inuit resistance to Western conquest.

In the last two chapters on the *Discovery* Expedition, 1901–04, I had far greater access to a range of sources, thanks to the Scott Polar Research Institute. During this expedition, many sailors and officers kept journals, carefully preserved through the years in Cambridge. I have used the journals of the lower decks, though these still number far less than officers’ journals and tend to be more reticent and shorter in content, signalling not only lesser literacy but also perhaps a legitimate concern that diaries of dissent could be discovered, dissident diarists punished. Nevertheless, the sailors’ journals have allowed me to approach class segregation during the *Discovery* Expedition critically; this is discussed in most detail in Chapter 4.

In all, throughout this thesis I imaginatively narrativise racial, gendered and classed Others. Doing so begins to rebalance a polar historiography heavily skewed towards the actions, words and thoughts of a few in an essentialised space thought to be discursively constructed by precisely these actions, words and thoughts. I subscribe to a politics of history that seeks to topple an enduring truism, one succinctly summed up by Howard Zinn: “The earth has for so long been so sharply tilted on behalf of the rich, the white-skinned, the male, the powerful, that it will take enormous effort to set it right.”⁶² This thesis represents my attempt to tilt the poles aright.

⁶² Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 26.

Chapter 1

From the Royal Arctic Theatre to “negro songs”:

Polar performance in the first half of the nineteenth century

During the winter of 1850–51, the first American expedition to the Arctic was frozen in the ice, slowly drifting down Baffin Bay out to the Atlantic. With the darkness encouraging depression and deficient diets scurvy, the expedition began drifting in spirit too. Surgeon Elisha Kent Kane’s hugely popular, eloquently written narrative described the anxieties that went round and round in men’s minds during this time:

The wild voices of the ice and wind, the strange sounds that issued from the ship, the hummocks bursting up without an apparent cause through the darkness, the cracks and the dark rushing water that filled them, the distorted wonder-working of refraction; in a word, all that could stimulate, or sicken, or oppress the fancy, was a day and nightmare dream.¹

But all was not so gloomy: the intense pressures of polar living and its attendant affects were offset by a series of effervescent, camp theatrical performances of farce and romance aboard the ship that cheered officers and sailors alike.

This chapter argues that the cathartic performance traditions of polar theatre, and in particular cross-dressing and blackface, were of paramount importance to polar expedition society, and that polar theatre can be regarded as a fluid construct that evolved over the course of 60 years from the 1810s to have

¹ Elisha Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin: A Personal Narrative* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 291.

its own idiosyncrasies shaped by the natural and social environment. In particular, polar theatre was saturated with homoerotic impulses, had a restorative quality in the debilitating social and climatic environment, and spoke to, even aided, colonial endeavour.

I track the course of polar theatre through the well-known but critically under-examined writings of three polar explorers: William Edward Parry, Clements Markham and Elisha Kent Kane. Though their expeditions spanned some 30 years, I argue that throughout polar exploration there was a common consciousness between expeditions, an understanding of and appreciation for previous polar endeavours and their customs transferred through written and oral mediums. This can be attributed mostly to the fact that literate polar explorers were keen readers of previous expedition diaries (in fact, many libraries on board ships headed to the Arctic or Antarctic were stocked with well-known polar narratives), resulting in an overall common body of text among exploration society, in which cross-dressing and blacking-up for entertainment were described. The British Admiralty required, read and banked official reports of expeditions too. The lower decks of sailors, many illiterate, were also agents in passing on polar theatrical traditions; Mary Isbell has argued that shipboard theatricals were primarily an oral tradition and that “whether they learned on land or at sea, sailor amateurs passed the conventions along from ship to ship with each new voyage.”² As such, I view polar expeditions not as singular events isolated from one another, but as a chain of interrelated societies of years-long expeditions and decades-long narrative interpretation that directly appropriated aspects from one another.

² Isbell, “P(l)aying off Old Ironsides,” 9–10.

I begin with the British naval officer William Edward Parry, who was revered by later polar expedition society. His strategies for coping with the climate became cherished traditions. In particular, Parry set precedents as to how men at the poles were to feel and function, instilling in future generations of polar explorers the compulsion for introspection and fear of bodily changes due to cold temperatures. Parry offset this collective hysteria with polar theatre, produced and primarily performed by officers, where ailing bodies could be rematerialised, most popularly as women, for the amusement and sexual gratification of the crew. His Royal Arctic Theatre lacked sophistication: the first ever play written in the Arctic was devoid of nuance but heavy in outright propaganda.³ Nevertheless, it was the genesis of a performance tradition that reappeared expedition after expedition, even affecting colonial encounters with Inuit, as shown during Parry's second expedition. The Royal Arctic Theatre would continue to delight during expeditions until Robert Falcon Scott's exploration of Antarctica at the beginning of the twentieth century. It evolved as a specific genre that represented and placated a polar society that had its own rules and conventions.

A controlling leader, Parry's expeditions in search of a Northwest Passage in the late 1810s and early 1820s were managerial exercises in tinkering with the diets, exercise routines and hygiene of men in an effort to ward off polar winter diseases. A pedant and paternalist, Parry's constant control over "the men" occluded any heroic contestation of physical feats and great suffering, and instead drew individual bodies into an overarching, technical equation where variables such as food were worked and reworked until the desired outcome of

³ The Royal Arctic Theatre is a mean average of the names by which it was known. Every period of polar exploration produced a slight variation. Moira Dunbar, "The Royal Arctic Theatre," *Canadian Art* 15:2 (1958): 110.

good bodily and mental health was achieved. However, behind Parry's domineering control over all bodily functions was a thinly veiled fear that poor hygiene and malaise could lead to moral vice. Parry wrote: "I dreaded the want of employment as one of the worst evils that was likely to befall us."⁴ I argue that in the recesses of "want of employment" was the possibility of same-sex contact between men, exemplified by the admiration for female roles in the theatre. Parry's tight management of his sailors can be read as an attempt to deter incidences of same-sex desire – when these homosocial environments produced homosexual possibilities – suggesting that the running of polar expedition society was grounded in same-sex impulses even as these explorations were celebrated as hyper-masculine, nationalistic enterprises.

Following Parry's initial forays into the Canadian Arctic, polar exploration activity dipped in levels until the lost expedition of John Franklin in 1845. I argue that the huge search-and-rescue operations mounted for Franklin inadvertently caused the golden age of polar cross-dressing and blackface, when crews of ships, locked in the ice together during long and arduous winters, came together to perform and enjoy extravagant theatrical performances. Through a reading of Clements Markham's popular narrative of a rescue expedition in 1850–51, I suggest that these theatrical performances grew in sophistication, but like Parry's plays before them, they were primarily produced and performed by officers, restricting opportunity for social criticism of conditions on board through drama. However, during one night social control was loosened for a hedonistic masquerade ball when swathes of men willingly rematerialised their sexual and racial personas, suggesting that nationalistic exploration and concern

⁴ William Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage, and Narrative of an Attempt to Reach the North Pole* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 1844), 40.

for Franklin, could, in fact, create radical space on the frozen frontier for men to escape the confines of their usually stoic subjectivities. In all, I argue that this fraternal, sexualised and alcohol-laced play interrogated the hegemonic narratives of heroic polar exploration.

Finally, I turn to the American influence on polar theatricals with an examination of the official narrative of the first American expedition to the Arctic, the First Grinnell Expedition (1850–51). Written by surgeon Elisha Kent Kane after the commander, Edwin De Haven, declined the opportunity to officially chronicle the journey, this narrative offers a different view of polar expedition society, focusing intensely on the medical health of the officers and sailors. Kane's documentation of the onset of scurvy exemplifies the polar explorer's penchant for bodily inspection and mental introspection: "Old pains were renewed, old wounds opened; even old bruises and sprains, received at barely-remembered periods back, came to us like dreams."⁵ However, his writing betrays a classed response to these idiosyncratic polar diseases as he pathologised the lower-class sailors, thereby exposing social hierarchies and their resultant tensions on board both British and American expeditions despite frequent proclamations in their official accounts that all was well and cheerful with "the men." I use Kane's writing, therefore, to expose more vividly entrenched class lines in polar exploration.

It was the American sailors who exclusively produced theatricals during this expedition, thereby offering a different dynamic to the British theatrical tradition of officer-as-director. Furthermore, the expedition yielded another type of polar performance: plantation songs, which, following on from Kane's

⁵ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 126.

expedition, would undergo potent alterations on icy shores. The singing of “negro songs” on Christmas Day in 1850 was a fitting American contribution to the canon of polar performances: it betrayed a nostalgic yearning for the comforts and contours of institutionalised racism against black bodies at a time when white men’s bodies were literally falling apart. Unifying the crew through their racist imagery, the songs eradicated class differences for one night by reminding men of the power attributed to their white identity. Conversely, the singing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” followed these sentimental songs, suggesting that notions of American identity, “historically steeped in contradictory patterns and ambivalent relationships,” were heavily invested in the racially defined Other at a time when the heroic endeavours of De Haven and his men, as fashioned by Kane, were helping construct new, imperialist ideas of American nationhood.⁶

Attentive to changes and continuities in history, throughout these expeditions I track the genealogy of the Royal Arctic Theatre through various influential actors: men who served with Parry would go on to become keen patrons of Arctic theatre in the middle of the decade and beyond. Furthermore, I trace the developing sophistication of polar theatre, as well as its reflection of class lines – a hitherto under-explored aspect of polar exploration more generally. Overall, the expeditions that I critically examine provide broad historical contextualisation for the following chapters as well as the foundations of many arguments – homoeroticism, restorative qualities and the importance of farce to imperial force – that are developed in greater detail later. Finally, it is my contention that the genealogy of polar performance offers another definition of

⁶ Cecilia O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

the polar frontier, one less vested in heroic, masculine narratives and more appreciative of varied polar players' colourful penchant for theatrics.⁷

“Unpleasant consequences” of the Parry Expeditions

British interest in the Arctic began in earnest with the three voyages of William Edward Parry in the 1820s in search of the coveted Northwest Passage linking the Atlantic to the Pacific, which promised easy access to Asia and a proliferation of commerce. Though Parry was a successful commander in cold climates, he was by no means interested in the Arctic itself. Parry, the son of the distinguished doctor and Fellow of the Royal Society Caleb Hillier Parry, wanted to ascend the naval hierarchies as quickly as possible, one of the first to use the polar regions as a testing ground for private and professional development. His pedantry for protocol and ability to keep precious men alive, and even more precious ships in one piece, would win him favour from the Admiralty.⁸ In a clever career move, the 29-year-old Lieutenant left for the Arctic in 1819 aboard the *Hecla*, with another ship, the *Griper*, in tow and also under his command. Both ships were furnished with enough provisions and stores to last two years and between them carried a compliment of 94 men, the smallest number possible to extend the use of resources. As the first expedition to overwinter in the Arctic, it set a precedent for how polar exploration was to be conducted. As Moira Dunbar explains:

⁷ Matthew Rebirthorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

⁸ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 60.

These expeditions often had to spend the winter in the Arctic, because the shortness of the navigation season did not allow them to do much exploration in just one summer. The practice was to push on as far as possible the first summer, winter in some convenient harbour, and in the spring continue the work of the expedition by extended sledge journeys. When the ship was at last released by the ice, often after ten or eleven months, the expedition would either push on or return home.⁹

The first expedition in search of the Northwest Passage was relatively successful, “discovering” half of a possible route and earning Parry his coveted promotion to the rank of commander.¹⁰ It made steady progress through the Canadian Arctic, easing its way to Melville Island through usually ice-blocked straits and passages. By crossing a longitude of 110°W, the expedition cashed in on a £5,000 prize offered by parliament for any voyage that passed that geographic mark. This was, however, where the smooth passage through the Arctic stopped. Both of Parry’s ships became iced-in for the winter in a bay on the south of Melville Island. After the two ships were covered with canvas and had snow packed around their hulls for (limited) protection, the two crews of officers and sailors were left to their own devices in the monotony of winter for the next ten months – no trivial matter, though Parry’s constant need to remind his reader of the cheerfulness of his expedition and its “comforts so abundant,” suggests that it was not as orderly as he attempted to portray.¹¹ It is, unfortunately, not possible to cross-check Parry’s account with reports from others, as all writing undertaken during the naval endeavour was handed in to the

⁹ Dunbar, “The Royal Arctic Theatre,” 110.

¹⁰ This notion of “discovering” land is a particularly troublesome one, as it suggests an absence of mankind or knowledge before the presence of Western men. In the Arctic context, Inuit society had existed long before the appearance of Parry, rendering his “discovery” of land there as highly arrogant and Eurocentric. Some scholars, during quinquennial celebrations of Columbus’ Bahamas landing, have suggested that “encounter” or even “conquest” would be more appropriate words than “discovery.” Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 114–15.

¹¹ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 149.

Admiralty upon returning home – though this is telling in its sweeping command over officers, underlings, and their potential counter-discourses.¹²

During this long and dark period, Parry sought to secure the emotional and physical well-being of his sailors, his actions establishing long-held standards of how men were to think, feel and behave during winters on ice. Parry was a regimented man whose successes in the Arctic can be attributed to his endless but resourceful involvement in every aspect of the expedition's society. Ultimately, he acted to ensure the well-being of his crew: over the course of his expeditions he twice turned back at supposedly crucial points when his crew or resources were exhausted. As Sarah Moss explains: "His determination that all should be seen to be well, and under control, on all occasions, precluded any heroic rhetoric about striving to overcome great obstacles or succeeding against all odds or persisting bravely in the face of danger."¹³ The high level of control he exerted over nearly every aspect of his expedition can be read in multiple ways: on the one hand, his narrative suggests that he did care, deeply, about the safety and well-being of each and every one of his men; on the other, his attention to the minutiae of his sailors' daily lives bordered on the obsessive and overbearing.

In a fatherly manner, he endlessly worried about his men's diets, his microscopic focus proving a somewhat dry read:

For the preservation of health, and as a necessary measure of economy, a few alterations were made in the quantity and quality of the provisions issued. I directed the allowance of bread to be permanently reduced to two thirds, a precaution, which, perhaps, it would have been as well to adopt from the commencement of the

¹² Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 60.

¹³ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 61.

voyage. A pound of preserved meat, together with one pint of vegetable or concentrated soup per man, was substituted for one pound of salt beef weekly; a proportion of beer and wine was served in lieu of spirits.¹⁴

Parry's pseudo-scientific tinkering with his men's diets as a means to "preserve health" – that is, ward off idiosyncratic polar ailments such as scurvy and winter depression – withdrew the bodies of his men from a discourse of heroic contestation and placed them as variables within an overarching technical equation. In slightly reducing or increasing the amount of a certain staple given to his men, Parry revealed himself as something of a scientific manager interested in the regulation of all influences exerted upon his subjects. His strategy for coping with the unpredictability in climate and society, then, was to map onto the Arctic a highly ordered rationalism based on scientific merit. And yet, the way in which Parry took control of the men's diets, turning the private enjoyment of eating into a public, regimented system of medicinal and psychological care cannot solely be read as the work of a fanatic hell-bent on eradicating sickness.

Between the lines of Parry's pedantry was a paternalist concern, one rooted in his Victorian upper-class self-righteousness, but one nevertheless indicative of sincerity. After outlining the daily proportion of lime juice to be given to each man, Parry continued, with an ostensibly sweetness in his tone: "This latter precaution may appear to have been unnecessary to those who are not aware how much sailors resemble children in all those points in which their own health and comfort are concerned."¹⁵ This "childlike" portrayal of his men is an echo of his elitist interaction with Inuit, presented below, who were also

¹⁴ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 35.

¹⁵ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 35.

rendered as being unaware of the importance of such matters as hygiene and manners. Furthermore, Parry's use of "those who are not aware" implies his own intellectual superiority over middle-class readerships, extending his paternalism far beyond the confines of his ships. In educating the reader, he was naturalising the classed nature of exploration while simultaneously producing a sense of marvel at explorers' benevolent but burdensome leadership.

Food was not the only aspect of the men's welfare that Parry managed. Exercise was also prescribed for the sailors. The men were made to march or run to the tune of an organ or a song of their own singing.¹⁶ During Parry's second voyage in search of the Northwest Passage (1821–23), which attempted a more southerly route, the winter regimen was much the same. As Parry himself noted, "I can add little or nothing to my former account of the manner in which we passed the winter at Melville Island; for the two situations were so nearly similar, and our resources necessarily so limited in this way, that it was not easy to produce much variety in the employment of them."¹⁷ Indeed, Parry's published narratives of his three expeditions are incredibly similar, as though each is an extension of the previous expedition that came before it, signalling clarity in his ambitions. Their ubiquity reinforced in Parry's mind, and by extension the Admiralty and future polar explorers, a "correct" strategy-cum-tradition for coping with social and environmental pressures. During the second expedition, then, Parry sent out his men to walk whenever the weather permitted and other duties were proving insufficient. Care was taken to keep men together; an officer would always lead with loaded arms should the party meet a polar bear. Dancing was also a popular pastime, the sailors presumably pairing up two-by-two,

¹⁶ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 43.

¹⁷ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 149.

though on occasion local Inuit would join in the merriment as dancing partners when Parry ordered the fiddler to play ditties on deck.¹⁸

A weekly newspaper, the *North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle* was produced by officers. The periodical, the first ever to be published in the Arctic, was highly optimistic in tone, articulating national fervour and excitement at the prospect of navigating the High North for Britain.¹⁹ The publication was meant to be entertaining and light-hearted; Parry was adamant that it should not cause upset to any individuals through criticism, whether jocular or not, suggesting censorship, both explicit and by prior restraint, and a prescient knowledge (or fear) of the extreme touchiness caused by polar night and isolation. However, as Hestor Blum points out, shipboard newspapers were more than just benign winter pastimes; they were community-building affairs that engaged theatrical performances through reviews and illustrations, in the process creating an intellectual commons on board: “At a vast remove from the usual literary spheres, sailors’ reading communities produced not just conversations, ideas, and challenges: they also produced new works for circulation, debate, and provocation, recognizing that all components of literary publication could be mutually engaged.”²⁰

Other activities in Parry’s winter programme included “drawing and knotting yarns, and in making points and gaskets”; a school was established on board to teach men to read and write; the men were also taught the Bible, and went to service every Sunday, lessons in patriarchal authority and resignation to, and obedience in, their present, but by no means safe, Arctic life; finally, men

¹⁸ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 154.

¹⁹ Erike Elce, ““One of the bright objects that solace us in these regions’: Labour, Leisure, and the Arctic Shipboard Periodical, 1820-1852,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46:3 (2013): 345.

²⁰ Michael Bérubé et al., “Community Reading and Social Imagination,” *PMLA* 125 (2010): 423.

were given cleaning duties to keep the ship orderly.²¹ In many ways, this schedule of tasks and chores transformed the ships from naval, masculine spaces into an extension of the middle-class home, creating a feeling of domestic, familial bondage.²² In all, these endless winter amusements, micromanaged by Parry, had the effect of, “diverting the mind from the gloomy prospect which would sometimes obtrude itself on the stoutest heart.”²³

Despite this highly ordered rationalism, Parry’s writing also expresses a pervasive, underlying fear of this “gloomy prospect,” the idea, perhaps, that social order would collapse if the men were left to fester in the darkness. At times, Parry’s compulsive regulation of the bodies of his men teetered on the edge of a hysterical panic that if he did not, the crew would spontaneously erupt in depression, violence or mania. A look at the manner in which Parry managed the physical health of his men as a means to secure moral health, a nineteenth-century discourse discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, is particularly telling: “While care was thus taken to adopt all the physical means within our reach, for the maintenance of health and comfort among the crews, recourse was also had to some of a moral nature, which experience has shewn [sic] to be useful auxiliaries in the promotion of these desirable objects.”²⁴

It was widely believed at the time that scurvy, caused by a deficiency of certain vitamins and minerals, was the product of poor hygiene and morals. In the Victorian imaginary on both sides of the Atlantic, laziness and dirtiness were thought to result in moral corruption and vice. In the American army, for example, soldiers lived under strict surveillance of hygiene and habit to avoid the

²¹ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 45.

²² Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 44.

²³ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 36.

²⁴ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 36.

chance of reckless, “degenerate” behaviour.²⁵ In the confined, isolated Arctic, these concerns were especially pressing. “It would, perhaps, indeed be less difficult to imagine a situation in which cheerfulness is more likely to be desired, or less likely to be maintained, than among a set of persons (and those persons seamen too) secluded for an uncertain and indefinite period from the rest of the world.” The incidence of scurvy was a warning that the morality of men was beginning to decay, leading, possibly, to an end scenario of social implosion. Parry became even more explicit on this point, his tone again betraying his upper-class presumption of his readers’ knowledge: “The astonishing effects produced by the passions of the mind, in inducing or removing scorbutic symptoms, are too well known to need confirmation.”²⁶

Passions of the mind: Parry believed that illnesses such as scurvy were linked to feeling and emotion, to “gloomy prospects,” or, as he also referred to it, “unpleasant consequences,” and so he compulsively watched for any signs of the disease in the men – and perhaps attributed any legitimate signs of discontent with mental or physical illness. The “medical gentlemen” were instructed to conduct weekly inspections of the men’s shins and gums; clothing was to kept neat and clean; beds, inspected by Parry himself while the men were made to run around the upper deck, were a particular source of anxiety; bodily hygiene was ensured by scheduled bathing. These inspections were constant and thorough, and with it the meticulously planned regimes of exercise and eating described

²⁵ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 26.

²⁶ William Parry, *Journal of a Second Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage* (London: John Murray, 1824), 123

above, they represented a methodology for combating the onset of malaise, its resultant scorbutic diseases and any threat to the success of the mission.²⁷

However, Parry's obsession with any sign or symptom of scurvy presenting itself mapped onto the polar explorer a kind of compulsive, anxiety-ridden fetish of bodily inspection. Parry's paternalist, almost pastoral, care over the men introduced a "morally guided approach to naval discipline," breaking from previously more martial approaches that were littered with alcohol abuse and corporal punishment. But his moral supervision unwittingly produced new structures of feeling among polar expedition society.²⁸ In turn, these introspective and inspective processes became notable polar literary traditions, as will be discussed through the writing of Elisha Kent Kane. Explorers undergoing climatically related changes became nervy, obsessive and terrorised, then articulated in their diaries – in wrought detail – the changes to their heroic bodies. Thousands on both sides of the Atlantic read these bodily narratives, imbuing future polar explorations (keen readers of previous accounts of polar exploration) with sickening anticipation.

If sexualities are produced through discourse, a Foucauldian principle, then it seems that records of bodily inspection can also uncover new structures of thought and medical classifications. When American recruits in World War Two were inspected and questioned about homosexual tendencies by army psychiatric authorities assigned to weed out "unfit" men, they were unwittingly being asked to think about or question their sexuality for the first time or with more elaborate vocabularies, thereby initiating a level of sexual introspection and classification

²⁷ Defined as relating to or affected with scurvy.

²⁸ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 43.

not experienced before.²⁹ Similarly, in inspecting for signs of physical and moral decay, another form of supposed degeneracy, Parry instilled in his men and generations of explorers to come a kind of anxious, consuming introspection and desire for medical classification that directly fed back into their sense of identity. Both methods of exposure began with an authority keen to segregate populations based on undesirable qualities (queerness, scurvy), but, in both instances, this process was transferred from the inspector to the minds of the inspected, where it quickly took on its own agency. Introspection would then run wild, and with it, men would gaze at one another to chart signs of bodily decay, resulting in a sexualised arena where they discovered, instead, previously under-interrogated shades of eroticism. Crip theorist David Serlin confirms that this conflation of processes occurred because “male competence for military service was defined both by the examiners, who were fully vested in the logic of the examination process, and by the recruits themselves, through whose naked features able-bodiedness and male beauty were combined.” These military men, evaluating the worthiness of one another, normalised both a sense of superior maleness and its inherent eroticism.³⁰

“Gloomy prospects.” “Unpleasant consequences.” What, precisely, did Parry mean by these nebulous phrases that he never fully articulated? As Moss sufficiently argues: “It is not a question Parry ever appears to contemplate, but it sometimes seems that in winter, all his own energies on all three of his voyages were consumed by the endeavour not to find out.”³¹ While Parry or Moss may not have cared to find out, I suggest that what Parry was referring to in part, consciously or not, was the fear of class rebellion and insubordination,

²⁹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 22.

³⁰ Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity,” 157.

³¹ Moss, *Scott’s Last Biscuit*, 66–67.

particularly in the form of non-normative sexual relations, as already suggested above in the discussion of inspections.

Sodomy would have been fresh on Parry and the Admiralty's minds. In 1815, just four years before Parry's first expedition for the Northwest Passage, the HMS *Africaine*, returning from a four-year cruise of the East Indies, was the focus of a public sodomy scandal. After the *Africaine* sailed home to Britain, courts martial sentenced marine James Cooper and three others to hang for sodomy, while marine Jonathon Parsons and a younger boy were given a combined 370 lashes. All men were from the lower decks. However, that the courts punished only five men is misleading: the incredibly high incidence of sexual activity on board went beyond the actions of these five men. Queer naval historian Barry Burg, who exposed the *Africaine*'s history of rife same-sex intercourse, explains:

The large number of active participants in sexual activity on board the *Africaine*, their involvement with one another in fluid rather than dyadic relationships, the network that existed among them, the semi-public or public nature of some of their engagements, the stability of the group over an extended period of time, the existence of recognised meeting places where sexual acts took place, and the general awareness among the ship's crewmen, whether or not involved in sodomy and indecency, suggests that there existed on board a company of men bound together in a loose confraternity of some sort by their sexual activities.³²

Parry, a stickler for naval code, must have been aware of the scandalous four-year history of the *Africaine*'s sojourn in sexual indecency, his inspection of beds on board the *Hecla* and *Griper* in particular betraying his concern. Sailing into the Arctic, he would have feared a similar outcome and its potential impact on

³² Barry Burg, *Boys at Sea: Sodomy, Indecency, and Courts Martial in Nelson's Navy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 143.

his cherished career, the evidence of this fear existing in his narrative's silences. The fact that Parry did not articulate his unease over sodomy outright speaks volumes to his heightened anxiety; his deployment of the euphemism "unpleasant consequences" from the outset exposing a tacit engagement with incidences of same-sex sexuality within the Admiralty, the circuitous language signalling a discursive need to speak the unspeakable.

As shown below in a reading of Parry's plays, homoeroticism was a widespread, hugely influential aspect of polar expedition society. A large group of men existing in cramped, cold conditions for years on end could hardly not be affected by the close proximity of other male bodies – glamorised and eroticised in their heroic conditions – and the near-total lack of women. While I explore the nature of this homoeroticism in detail in Chapter 3, I am historicising it here to show its significant long-term impact on Western societies in polar regions. Furthermore, if popular medical discourse held that scurvy was caused by a lack of hygiene and morals, then it seems likely that scurvy may have also been considered as an indicator of sexual vice. In that case, Parry's fear of scurvy was, in reality, that it indicated a lack of stringent order among the ranks that would lead to men bunking with other men in the darkness, a complete subversion of the heroic ideology guiding the nationalistic expedition that thrived off its heteronormative masculine power.

If this was the case, it seems Parry's overarching technical strategy to polar exploration was guided by the likelihood of non-normative sexual relations. The ever-present fear of sexual degeneracy and the possibility of another HMS *Africaine* episode became manifest in the pedantic ordering of the two ships, resulting in a tight scientific management of everything from diet to prayer as a

means continually to block or deflect sexual drive and insubordination. A fear of the queer in polar exploration, then, runs throughout heroic polar exploration, directing the authoritative hand as it made its decisions and interrogating its role as a means for manly restoration.

It is hardly surprising then that homoeroticism was rife in the tradition of Arctic theatre, which Parry single-handedly established during the course of his three expeditions in the 1820s. An examination of the plays held aboard his ships reveals sexual tension as a social concern addressed through drama. Of course, the theatre also spoke to the overbearing climate and concern for well-being more generally; it became the space to work through fears cathartically and to express desire for success in a largely stoic society. But more than just a reactionary enterprise, the theatre also became a site of surreal cultural exchange between heroic explorer, his officers, sailors and Inuit.

Parry's drive to keep his men entertained and physically and psychologically healthy centred on the extravagant production of theatre; his enthusiasm for the idea suggests he regarded his already heavy schedule of activities as somehow lacking in good spirited fun. With all other narratives of the expedition quashed, Parry's assertion that the theatre was *his* idea seems questionable. The reality was, in all likelihood, that others proposed and he approved before taking credit. Nevertheless, during his long description of wintering activities, he wrote: "I was desirous of finding some amusement for the men during this long and tedious interval. I proposed, therefore, to the officers to get up a play occasionally on board the *Hecla*, as the readiest means of preserving among our crews that cheerfulness and good-humour which had

hitherto subsisted.”³³ The officers took to the theatre with gusto as they produced and starred in performances, kick-starting a tradition of polar farce for a century to come. Parry’s influence in this regard should not be underestimated: captains and officers on later polar expeditions specifically resurrected the production and performance conventions established by Parry, seen as the “*paterfamilias* of the Arctic.” The habitual renewal of the Royal Arctic Theatre became a form of “ancestor worship.”³⁴

Parry chose Lieutenant Frederick Beechey as stage manager and the first performance was set for 5 November 1819. On that night, the Theatre Royal, North Georgia, located on the inadequately heated, canvas-covered upper deck of the *Hecla*, opened with *Miss in Her Teens*, a farce by playwright David Garrick depicting the trials and tribulations of Miss Biddy and the various “men of fashion” who attempt to court her.³⁵ Parry was immediately impressed with the theatre’s ability to kill time, as though time was a troublesome pressure-builder that needed to be expended, filled, controlled.

I found, indeed, that even the occupation of fitting up the theatre and taking it to pieces again, which employed a number of the men for a day or two before and after each performance, was a matter of no little importance, when the immediate duties of the ship appeared by no means sufficient for that purpose.

Aside from its ability to reflect the social realities on board the two ships, then, the physical construction and deconstruction of the theatre was highly valued, the

³³ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 36.

³⁴ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 42.

³⁵ The location of the theatre on the upper deck was significant. The upper deck was not linked to a specific naval rank, acting instead as a somewhat more neutral space between officer and sailor. As a large, open space, the upper deck also allowed the theatre to act as a site of discipline, affording suitable distance between officer and sailor seating, thereby reaffirming naval hierarchies. Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 38.

psychosocial benefits of drama beginning not at curtains-up, but at the moment the officers took up its production and sailors began constructing theatre sets and working behind the scenes. Indeed, Parry referred to theatrical entertainment as a “utility.”³⁶ Furthermore, the repetitious nature of these tasks, the regular schedule of rehearsal and production, would have provided men with structure at a time when the usual organising principle of daytime had faded into a monotony of grey and black. And in exchange for their hard work and dedication, the theatre provided relief and entertainment.³⁷ This cheer, however, was thought to be curative of scurvy, suggesting backhanded attempts at bodily control.

Parry himself took a role as “an example of cheerfulness,” playing Mr Fribble.³⁸ But it was not Parry’s merry acting that won most acclaim. Commendation was saved for the female roles. The *North Georgia Gazette* heaped praise on the female parts, “which were performed with no inconsiderable share of animation, and feminine delicacy.”³⁹ The choosing of this play as the first at the Theatre Royal, which centred on a woman and her multiple suitors, essentially a story of courtship, sexual tension and love, is highly significant: it goes to show that a homosocial society of men that had not seen women for months on end yearned for female presence during an expedition based on gender exclusivity and masculine power. Officers recognised this burgeoning homoerotic tension between men and used theatre as a safe outlet for sexual tension. But for the men performing, the theatre was also a site of sexual experimentation. In Parry’s regimented world, he paradoxically gave room for certain men to transgress the boundaries of rigidly defined gender roles through

³⁶ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 40.

³⁷ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 40.

³⁸ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 36.

³⁹ William Parry, *Journal for a voyage for the discovery of a North-west passage* (London: John Murray, 1821), cited in Pearson, ““No Joke in Petticoats,”” 51.

cross-dressing, though this gender play was the reserve of the upper-class officers. On 11 November, the sun disappeared for 96 days, after which, performances were held every two weeks.⁴⁰ The sun's departure literally brought women (or cross-dressed men) to the front of the stage, so that the audience could look on lustfully and ward off any "unpleasant consequences" through their public displays of heterosexual masquerade.

The theatre delighted. As dramatist Mike Pearson aptly sums up, "Midshipmen played young girls and the future explorer James Ross (commander of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, after which the Antarctic volcanoes were named) was a prominent 'leading lady,' playing Corinna in *The Citizen* on 8 December and Mrs. Bruin in *The May of Garrett* on 23 December."⁴¹ Though no record exists of why some officers were chosen for female roles, the fact that certain men would appear as women multiple times suggests they had the ability to portray women convincingly and were chosen for their androgynous or effeminate qualities, or that the high-contrast drag of beefy, bearded men was particularly comic. James Ross would go on to become a prolific polar explorer, discovering the Magnetic North Pole in 1831 and a significant portion of the Antarctic in the 1840s. His love of theatre would accompany him during his future expeditions, notably during the golden age of Arctic farce in the late 1840s and early 1850s, described below, where he went from leading lady to expedition leader. Actors such as Ross show that a genealogy of polar theatre is traceable through the influence of particular directors, actors and spectators. Horatio Austin, also discussed later, served with Parry and saw the immense psychosocial benefit of theatre and its restorative qualities, subsequently setting

⁴⁰ Pearson, "No Joke in Petticoats," 51.

⁴¹ Pearson, "No Joke in Petticoats," 51.

up a theatre during his own expedition. Camp, homoerotic play then found a way to evolve through the desires of particular men, representing a kind of queer, subversive genealogy of sexual experimentation that flows through the history of polar exploration and interrogates its representation as the epitome of heterosexual masculinity.

For Christmas in 1819, the Theatre Royal put on its grandest performance: the oldest extant play written in the Arctic. Parry wrote, “our authors, therefore, set to work, and produced, as a Christmas piece, a musical entertainment, expressly adapted to our audience... and to stimulate, if possible, the sanguine hopes which were entertained by all on board, of the complete accomplishment of our enterprise.”⁴² Amid the excitement, costumes were made from spare sheets and curtains. As Parry noted, the drama was produced to reflect the actualities of the Arctic, and the finished product certainly did so: the plot very closely followed the experiences of the expedition, crudely and unimaginatively so.⁴³ The play has five scenes, each set in a different location. In the first scene, the ships leave their winter quarters in Melville Bay; in the second, they meet a bear that is shot and killed; in the third, two sweethearts back home, Poll and Susan, are depicted awaiting and being delivered good news on the expedition. In the penultimate scene, there is an encounter with an Inuk, grotesquely represented as comically unintelligent; in the final scene, the ships return home triumphantly to England.⁴⁴

⁴² Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 46.

⁴³ A close reading is possible due to the discovery of the original manuscript at the back of a copy of the *North Georgia Gazette*. The full script has been made available by Daniel Claustre, “‘The North-west Passage, or voyage unfinished’: A Polar Play and Musical Entertainment,” *Polar Record* 21 (1982): 101–14.

⁴⁴ Inuk is the singular noun for Inuit.

Though the play's themes may appear blunt and creatively lacking, the crew enjoyed the performance. Where later polar farce, such as *A Ticket-of-Leave* analysed in Chapter 3, was far subtler in its dream-like exploration of expedition society and aspects of longing, the first play in the Arctic was more direct; it served as an unabashed form of propaganda. In the manner of Parry's strict, totalising command, it gave little room for the men to tease power structures on board, existing as a licensed entertainment produced and performed by officers. As Daniel Claustre summarises, "As a morale booster the play has a remarkable fixity and clarity of purpose: the North-west Passage will be conquered, and the lads will return home safely to faithful wives and sweethearts, covered in glory and loaded with prize money, having given worthy service to their beloved king and country."⁴⁵ This kind of blind propaganda exemplified the brisk, nationalistic optimism that permeated the expedition, at least for some elites. As the first expedition deliberately to winter in the Arctic, and a relatively successful one at that, Parry and his men had yet to experience the Arctic as a place of death and prolonged suffering. It would seem that as countries' engagement with the north and south poles developed and histories were written and reproduced by naval leaders aware of previous expeditions, the need for more nuanced theatre grew with an ever-greater awareness of the dangers of the coldness.

Over the next half decade, when Parry would re-enter the Canadian Arctic twice more in search of a passage, the theatre changed from an exploratory exercise to ascertain its effectiveness in curing men of malaise to a preordained, widely anticipated feature. For the second voyage, preparations

⁴⁵ Claustre, "The North-west Passage, or voyage unfinished," 98.

were made in advance, an allotment of precious storage space on board given to theatrical materials before departure so that costumes no longer had to be improvised from expedition material.

The theatre's centrality to the successes of expeditions expanded beyond its curative purposes when, during this second expedition, local Inuit witnessed the preparations for a performance on board the *Fury*. Parry's interaction with Inuit was typical of the British colonial sentiment of the day. He viewed the Inuit with disgust – a word that is repeated often in his hyperbolic descriptions of episodes with the indigenous population: "It is impossible to describe the horribly disgusting manner in which they sat down, as soon as they felt hungry, to eat their raw blubber... the very smell of which, as well as the appearance, was to us almost insufferable." Parry depicted the Inuit as mischievous thieves, not to be trusted. Interaction with these people, seemed, in Parry's mind, to be a point of contagion, as though their alleged savagery and dirtiness could infect his men's ordered and compartmentalised bodies. He continued, "When our people turned away, literally unable to bear the sight without being sick, they would, as a good joke among themselves, run after them, holding out a piece of blubber or raw seal's flesh dripping with oil and filth, as if inviting them to partake of it."⁴⁶

This example of Inuit agency is revealing. Parry and his officers no doubt made clear in countless spoken and unspoken ways that their expedition, as with most armed imperial incursions, would proceed with or without local approval. Thus, to chase white men with blubber, a local food they clearly found "disgusting," was a performance of its own. It comically enacted Inuit displeasure, if not disgust, with condescending white supremacists, as it mimed a

⁴⁶ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 120.

will to run them off. Inuit, long native to these lands, would continue to fashion various performative means of dealing with interlopers as time wore on, shown later in Kane's brief encounters with indigenous populations.

White sailors would only be allowed to visit Inuit villages in groups of six, with an officer in accompaniment, to prevent the men from, in Parry's words, "occasioning the Esquimaux any disturbance or apprehension" – the larger disturbance to their environment loudly unspoken.⁴⁷ It is clear that Parry's concerns regarding his men's behaviour in the village were not due to a fear of disturbing Inuit, whom he regarded with revulsion. Instead, it stemmed from his overzealous control of his men's bodies and his fear of what any one or more of them might do. That is, groups of six or more assured safety in numbers, should outgunned Inuit nonetheless resort to violent self-defence of their homelands. Large groups also served self-policing functions, rendering one-to-one illicit liaisons between white man and Inuit woman virtually impossible. Such miscegenation would have proved unacceptable for the upper-class officer, and so he effectively wrote this variable out of the equation, his sailor's dealings with Inuit structured by his management of sexuality.

Inuit found means both comic and serious to signal their displeasure with the uninvited. The first time Inuit visited Parry's ship, he noted that they were wholly incurious and indifferent, much to surprise of the Western men. Their invariable disinterest in the interlopers, readable as a form of resistance in the context of Parry's elitist, self-aggrandising narrative, continued as Parry's incursion wore on. In early February, two male Inuit called Okotook and Arnaneelia and their two wives took a break from their fishing to come aboard

⁴⁷ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 155.

the *Fury*. What followed was an exchange between Western and indigenous culture, an imparting of values that is passed off lightly in Parry's text:

We showed them the stage and scenery that were just put up, and invited them and their wives to the play about to be performed this evening... As they came three or four hours before the performance of "John Bull" was to commence, they began to grow tired and impatient, especially when it became dusk, and candles were brought into the cabin... Finding that they grew uneasy, I made no objection to their returning, and sent them off loaded with bread-dust and some oil for each of their lamps. They remained long enough, however, to have a peep at *Mrs. Brulgruddery*, whose dress, when they were informed it was that of a *kabl=o=ona nool=e=e~o* (European wife), they were very anxious in examining, and seemed to grieve at going away without sharing the diversion which this and other preparations seemed to promise.⁴⁸

Having a "peep" at Mrs Brulgruddery was far more than a simple look at an officer in drag; it was a rare glimpse into the paradoxical activities of expeditions, and one willingly offered to a racially defined Other of low standing in the supremacist imagination. It suggests that Parry felt no shame about his cross-dressed men, that the putting on of a dress of a European wife was considered an important enough part of British naval culture to warrant a brief unveiling to the curious Inuit. If Parry's disgust at the Inuit's alleged dirtiness and trickery informed his interaction, then the dress may have been offered as a marker of civilisation, the display of the garment conjuring counter-images, at least in Parry's mind, of the cleanly, virtuous Victorian woman. But this display becomes jaded by the fact that Mrs Brulgruddery was not a woman; she was a man in drag, at once showing the Inuit the importance of the "European wife" and the fluidity of this cultural assemblage, the actual slipperiness of supposedly

⁴⁸ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 161. Parry used punctuation to write out Inuit words phonetically.

rigid gender categories. This assemblage becomes further disrupted when considering the sexual connotation to “peep,” the Inuit’s gaze upon Mrs Brulgruddery perhaps reproducing Parry’s own sexual objectification of women – from behind a boundary, only for the briefest of glimpses.

These varied paradoxes Parry succinctly summed up, with an insistence that Inuit “wondered how we came to travel to their country without our wives.”⁴⁹ Reminded by the looming, daily presence of the massive ships iced-in, Inuit knew full well that Englishmen’s larger, superior fleet construction enabled longer, farther journeys – even as Inuits’ own seal-hunting and whaling continued through bleakest winter through use of smaller boats. Western women’s role in large-scale, longer-term exploring – bring them along, or instead give valuable storage space and stage presence to their garments – no doubt struck Inuit women and men as another peculiar cultural difference, worthy of considerable comment.

To conclude, Parry’s expeditions to the Arctic in the late 1810s and early 1820s represent so much more than an initial foray into polar spaces. They created precedents among future explorers, establishing a queer genealogy of raced and classed homoerotic performance, often constructed in dialectical relationship with Inuit cultures losing control of their lands and seas. In freezing temperatures, elite officers with vested interests in the geographic, scientific, and military outcomes of expeditions pursued pleasurable recreational activities designed, in part, to pacify sailors and forestall discontent. Parry also instilled in future generations of polar explorers an obsessive need to document and deliberate over men’s health. These discourses came to a crescendo with Mrs

⁴⁹ Parry, *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, 182.

Brulgruddery; the Inuit who gained a “peep” at the “European wife” witnessed a complex constellation of paradoxical gendered and homoeroticised discourses played out on the body of “explorers,” allegedly the most hyper-masculine of them all.

“Punch and polkas, whisky and waltzes” during Austin’s expedition

The disappearance of John Franklin’s expedition in the late 1840s brought on a new era in polar exploration: dozens of expeditions were mounted over the following two decades, slyly shifting from search-and-rescue missions to flag-planting, land-grabbing exercises. However, the 1850s were also the golden age of polar farce, a little known fact. In the midst of all the concern over Franklin’s well-being, heroic men were rematerialising their sexual and racial personas on the icy frontier like never before. Their heady enjoyment of balls, plays and alcohol suggests that expensive, resource-consuming exploration could create space for fraternal, homoerotic play.

After Parry’s searches for the Northwest Passage ended in 1825, levels of activity in the Arctic withered as ice conditions in the 1830s made European whaling and sealing a disastrous enterprise. It was only in the late 1840s that interest soared again, due to the lost expedition of John Franklin. Franklin was a British Navy officer with Arctic experience: he had already commanded expeditions on land and sea in Canada, but a dismal overland exploration of the Coppermine River in 1819 left most of his party dead amid accusations of cannibalism. Further exploration was more successful, resulting in a knighthood, but his failed governorship of Tasmania in 1836–43 left him once again

humiliated and in desperate need of vindication. Believing, as Parry had done before and many would continue to do, that the Arctic represented a space of trial by ice where men could claim or restore their manliness, an ageing Franklin led two British Navy ships in 1845 to attempt to locate the Northwest Passage, though mid-nineteenth-century mapping made the existence of a passage increasingly unlikely.⁵⁰ Entering the Arctic in search of his honour, Franklin promptly disappeared among the ice and with him the 128 naval men who enabled his efforts.

Franklin's ship was provisioned for three years, but with no word from the expedition or any sightings by 1848, vested interests back home began to worry. The Admiralty dispatched search parties, which returned without a shred of evidence as to the whereabouts of the expedition. A national fixation with Franklin ensued, wholly creditable to Lady Jane Franklin, who exaggerated her husband's fame and possible fate to appeal to the hearts of naval men keen to capitalise on the heroic, nationalistic success promised in finding Franklin, especially in the wake of the massive loss of life and resources in the unsuccessful attempt to take Russian imperial territory in Crimea. She tirelessly petitioned the government and the Admiralty to send out search parties while organising private expeditions with funds she raised herself.

Dozens of national and private expeditions went in search of survivors, but Jane Franklin, frustrated with the lack of success, appealed to the American government for help, expanding Britain's search for the lost expedition into a transatlantic frenzy and causing a new age of Arctic exploration in the middle of the century. Back home, Franklin's expedition, which had left British shores to

⁵⁰ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 138.

little excitement, had become something of a national craze, the image of a brave gentleman of Franklin's stature, adrift on the ice, eliciting a nationwide, emotional response.

There were popular ballads about Lady Franklin's widowhood, spiritualist mediums all over Britain and America were falling over each other to claim super-natural information about the two ships, and the *Times* referred to the lost men as "The Arctic Expedition" as if there were no others. As stories began to trickle back from the Arctic, there were poems (good, bad and indifferent, but most bad), Sunday School tracts, plays, "panoramas" and magic lantern shows devoted to the exemplary nobility of the men on the expedition. Charles Dickens, already a figure of national importance, took a public interest, and Wilkie Collins wrote a play about the expedition.⁵¹

However, as ships of men made steady headway into the Arctic, the pursuit of geographic achievement and imperial advancement soon drowned out the Franklin fanfare, rendering finding the expedition of secondary importance. Nevertheless, thanks to Franklin, and the relentless campaigning of his wife, the Arctic was once again the focus of national and personal aspirations.

An underexplored aspect of the search for Franklin is that the men who travelled to the Arctic to risk their lives to rescue him – or for the glory that it promised – were soon having what can best be described as "a ball on ice." The late 1840s and 1850s were, without doubt, the golden age of polar farce. The celebrations during freezing winters, where ships of men would come together to entertain one another, would never be matched again in their grandeur, pomp and occasional debauchery. Familiar names crop up: James Ross, the prominent leading lady during Parry's expedition, mounted one of three expeditions in 1848. Horatio Austin, who served on Parry's third expedition, commanded his

⁵¹ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 138–39.

own fleet. Clements Markham, the driving force behind Robert Falcon Scott's Antarctic exploration, spent his first winter in the Arctic in 1850–51, when a total of 11 British ships and two American were out in the Canadian Arctic.

Markham was a hugely influential man in polar exploration, launching Scott's career during his presidency of the Royal Geographical Society.

Wherever Markham's name appears in the annals of polar exploration, however, farce is never far away. He was one of the key figures in the genealogy of polar theatrics; after he recorded the excesses of the winter of 1850–51, he joined British naval officer George Nares' ill-fated expedition to the North Pole in 1875, where in his diary he noted the histrionic talent and selection of gifted dresses on board, including one from Henry Irving.⁵² Then, his love of camp horseplay would be written into the collective subconscious of Antarctic exploration some 30 years later, when the Royal Arctic Theatre became the Royal Terror Theatre under the watchful eye of Antarctica's Mount Terror in the distance.

Markham began his illustrious career in the Royal Navy as a cadet in the Pacific. In 1850, he joined the search for Franklin as a midshipman aboard the *Assistance*, captained by Erasmus Ommanney and one of four ships in a fleet commanded by Captain Horatio Austin, representing a total of 180 men.⁵³ His published account of the expedition, brimming with boyish excitement, won him recognition, his opening pages already falling foul of betraying the ulterior motives – geographic discovery – thinly veiled by the search for Franklin:

⁵² Pearson, "No Joke in Petticoats," 53.

⁵³ Midshipman is a rank above cadet but below a sub-lieutenant.

No vessels ever sailed from England with a greater prospect of success: all on board were enthusiastic in the extreme, and determined to exert their utmost energies and use all the means in their power to further the noble cause in which they were engaged; the vast tracts of country discovered and explored by Captain Austin's Expedition will remain for ever on the map of the world a proof of how that determination has been carried out.⁵⁴

As Austin's four ships bunked down together for the winter in a strait between Griffith and Cornwallis Isle, "that determination," that irrepressible sense of optimism, was carried through to the theatre. Markham's narrative is short, yet a considerable portion of the text is dedicated to a lavish description of exuberant winter amusements. The theatre committee, run by Captain Ommanney as theatre manager yet powered by sailors' time and muscle, set about constructing the Royal Arctic Theatre on the enclosed upper deck of the *Assistance*. Their excitement about the theatre before it even began was indicative of Parry's influence, his paternalistic, morally guided command still echoing in the ship's pursuit of cheer and "the mid-Victorian ideal of the peaceful middle-class family."⁵⁵ This materialisation of the theatre, however, was far greater than Parry's in every respect.

A theatre was erected on board the *Assistance*, on a scale of magnificence which, considering the small means at the disposal of the Expedition, was truly marvellous. In spite of all the difficulties the manager had to encounter, the brilliant and artistic scenery of the "Royal Arctic Theatre" was displayed, to the admiration and delight of the whole Expedition... The stage was erected on the upper deck, and the front was made of painted canvas. Doric columns with vases of fruit and flowers were painted on each side of the curtain, and two snow statues of the Prince of Wales and the Princess Royal, were placed on either side of the orchestra.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Clements Markham, *Franklin's Footsteps: A Sketch of Greenland, Along the Shores of which His Expedition Passed, and of the Parry Isles, Where the Last Traces of It Were Found* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853), 47.

⁵⁵ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 44.

⁵⁶ Markham, *Franklin's Footsteps*, 77.

A magnificent chandelier, a proscenium painted with masonry and a drop-scene of a castle in the middle of a lake finished the exquisite staging.⁵⁷

The development of the theatre from Parry's initial expeditions to 1850 is startling. Originally an activity that belonged to an overarching, calculated programme designed to ward off malaise and scurvy and their attendant moral vice, it had become a multifaceted, all-encompassing enterprise that no longer served to "kill" time but rather had become a central, organising feature of it, superimposing onto reality a new dream-like temporality based on the preparation, construction, performance, review and deconstruction of the theatre. As Isbell elaborates: "One imagines a long period of preparations wherein the ship's company observed the painters creating a fictional world on canvas and actors rehearsing their parts. What would typically take place 'behind the scenes' of a professional production, in other words, was observable to all passersby."⁵⁸

Theatricals on board the *Assistance* were regular events that were wholeheartedly welcomed, with announcements and reviews of performances published in *The Illustrated Arctic News*, the expedition paper. On opening night, 9 November, the captain and officers performed *Married Life! or Did You Ever Send Your Wife To Camberwell?*, a "laughable farce," followed by yet another farce, *The Lottery Ticket*. On 9 January the "famous extravaganza" *Bombastes Furioso* was performed by officers to "great applause;" on 28 February, the historical drama *Charles the Twelfth*; that same night, a pantomime "written expressly for the occasion" by the ship's surgeon, *Zero, or Harlequin Light*.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Pearson, "No Joke in Petticoats," 52.

⁵⁸ Isbell, "P(l)aying off Old Ironsides," 10.

⁵⁹ Markham, *Franklin's Footsteps*, 77.

The script to *Zero* is reproduced at the back of Markham's published book. The play appropriated aspects of the Arctic climate as a commentary on shared, lived experience, "turning all the dangers and inconveniences to which we were exposed in those hospitable climes, into evil spirits that were leagued against us."⁶⁰ Polar performance was a cathartic exercise that helped crews of officers and men, colonial actors, cope better with the intense environmental and social pressures of polar living. As already demonstrated throughout this chapter, homoerotic tensions were played out on stage, as evidenced by the attention given to female roles in diaries and newspaper reviews of plays published on board, thereby safely dispersing any negative consequences of sexual frustration. *Zero* was a cathartic exercise too, tackling not sexual tension but fear of the overbearing climatic environment. Where Parry's first play in the Arctic was rather rudimentary in its symbolism and message of optimism, depicting the expedition's success in five straightforward scenes, *Zero* is an example of how polar theatre developed over time to reflect a deeper but uneasier respect for the Arctic.

The pantomime aggregated the daily fears of the expedition into characters – Zero, Bear, Frostbite, Iceberg, Hunger, Scorbutus and Fox – with their own narratives, personalities and weaknesses. The script, punchy and funny, depicts each fear not as a static entity easily overcome, but as malevolent beings that work against humans.

ZERO. Now, Frostbite, quickly! do your work right well,
And fix his hand fast in your icy spell.

FROSTBITE *touches man's hand, which becomes fixed.*

⁶⁰ Markham, *Franklin's Footsteps*, 77.

2nd MAN. Confound it all, I'm bitten in the thumb
How soon your flesh becomes cold, white, and numb.⁶¹

Polar space, then, is ascribed its own agency in *Zero*; it is represented as a place so unfit for men that it actively tries to rid itself of them, a sure commentary on the harsh environment surrounding the expedition that had seemingly swallowed Franklin's two ships whole. The appearance of fears on stage in iambic pentameter betrays the humanity of these allegedly heroic explorers, officers and men by exposing the fact that they could be scared like any "ordinary" other. However, the personification of fears simultaneously suggests a readiness among the men to confront cathartically and overcome their aggregated and individualised terrors. *Zero* ends with a belittling of these dangers through humour, the fears being transformed into clowns by the appearance of the good spirits Sun and Daylight. As performance theorist Heather Davis-Fisch surmises, "Through pantomime's generic reliance on transformations, *Zero* demonstrated that sailors could reimagine the actual threats of the Arctic as familiar and harmless figures then imaginatively overcome these threats with perseverance and positive thinking."⁶² *Zero* was more mature in message than the outright propaganda of Parry's plays where men bravely conquer the Northwest Passage with ease.

Zero, or Harlequin Light and earlier performances were still cultural productions stemming from the upper echelons of the expedition. Like Parry's plays, the performances at the Royal Arctic Theatre betrayed classed hierarchies and ideologies; *Zero*, though more complex than previous domestically written

⁶¹ Markham, *Franklin's Footsteps*, 137.

⁶² Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 33.

polar performances, can still be read as a form of entertainment designed to abate tensions among lower decks. While some lower-class men did act on stage during the winter, creating some opportunity to tease or temporarily invert power structures through humour, these subversions were, for the most part, made permissible only by sanction from command. Davis-Fisch argues that in many respects the theatre actually subtly regulated behaviour. A public-relations exercise by the allegedly caring captain who sanctioned it, the theatre encouraged good relationships between the theatre managers (officers) and its workers (sailors) and emboldened, through public reward in the form of audience cheers, a sense commitment to an overall cause.⁶³ In American expeditions, discussed below, shipboard theatricals differed. And during later British polar exploration, the plays were directed by an officer but performed solely by the lower decks, and grew so nuanced that teasing of power structures was entirely possible even within the confines of top-down endorsed performances.

As incredible as the Royal Arctic Theatre was during the winter of 1850–51, something altogether more fabulous occurred later that winter: the *Resolute* staged a masquerade ball for all four crews of the fleet wintering together.

“Captain Austin was not unmindful of the experience of a previous voyage, and in the form of a masked ball, put into execution a device which he learned under the able tuition of Captain Hoppner, when first lieutenant of the *Fury*.”⁶⁴ The expedition Markham was referring to was Parry’s third expedition (1824–25), in search of a Northwest Passage, where Henry Hoppner commanded the *Fury* alongside Parry’s *Hecla*. Austin’s predisposition to holding balls in a manner learnt off Parry evidences the extent of Parry’s continuing influence over polar

⁶³ Davis Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 36–37.

⁶⁴ Markham, *Franklin’s Footsteps*, 78.

exploration some 30 years later; Austin and his officers “recognized and emphasized links between their expedition and Parry’s... reaching their goal—finding Franklin—would continue Parry’s glorious legacy.”⁶⁵ As already stated, Markham, having witnessed the ball ordered by Austin (Austin having participated in Hoppner-Parry’s ball), would go on to participate in more theatricals in the 1870s, these traditions having become ingrained upon the common consciousness of expedition society.

While the pervasiveness of polar performance can be attributed to Parry, the high level of control officers exerted over its execution was occasionally relaxed as the course of exploration wore on. The masquerade ball was a riotous night. Markham’s description is worth quoting at length:

A bal masqué was accordingly announced on board the *Resolute*. Captain Ommanney arrived in a splendid sedan-chair, mounted on a sledge, drawn by eight men and attended by a goodly company, as Mayor of Griffith Island. Captain Austin was alternatively a “chair-mender,” a Carmelite, and a blacking-bottle. The lower deck of the *Resolute* was crowded with Arabs and Highlanders, old farmers and knights-errant, Jews and jockeys, old women and youthful damsels. The band played lustily until midnight; and the delights of that jovial evening were varied by punch and polkas, whisky and waltzes, cake and quadrilles. It was not until an early hour that the revellers returned to their respective ships, but not without creating considerable amusement to the more sober and steady of the party: the High Priest of Japan, tumbling against a snowy post, measured his length on the frozen sea; Bumble the Beadle was lost in a snowdrift; and the Moorish Chief positively refused to go home until daylight should appear.⁶⁶

This incredible scene of drunken men in costumes ranging from drag to Jew, dancing polkas two-and-two, complete with the High Priest of Japan “measuring his length,” interrogates, without question, the heroic ideologies of rescue

⁶⁵ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 42.

⁶⁶ Markham, *Franklin’s Footsteps*, 78.

expeditions and their subsequent imperial ambitions.⁶⁷ It goes to show how collective concern for Franklin and the attendant search and rescue enterprises, which were expensive, resource consuming and profoundly celebrated, could actually create radical space at the frontier for men to rematerialise and explore their sexual and racial personas. The fact that rich quotes such as these have been largely forgotten is due to discriminatory historiographical discourses that have sustained a project of essentialisation at a time when celebratory polar narratives are once again necessary. As such, this farcical cross-dressing has been rationalised within the confines of nineteenth-century normativity and its queerer implications disregarded. But the vast amounts of cross-dressed men, “youthful damsels,” most likely presented myriad opportunities for same-sex desire to be acted upon, the process of masking creating a liminal space where duty dissipated and desire could safely surface.⁶⁸ The alcohol lubricating the party probably facilitated easy slippages from the heteronormative order upon which the expedition outwardly ran. The dancing, the polkas and waltzes drew the bodies of drunken men close to one another. One can only begin to wonder what moments of same-sex desire occurred that heady night.

The vigour with which men took to the ball suggests a vast amount of pent up psychological tension. Captain Austin himself realised the importance of play during his previous expedition into the poles, announcing the ball on board to give the men the opportunity to put on masks and remove themselves, for one

⁶⁷ “Measuring his length” here certainly suggests that the “High Priest of Japan” measured his penis length. Prevailing racist stereotypes of Asian men held that they had small penises. If the naval man dressed as the High Priest of Japan was aware of and sought to perpetuate these stereotypes, he may have been misguidedly measuring his length to check the veracity of his racial rematerialisation. This begs the question: who was he measuring his length in front of, and how much of a display was it? See: David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁶⁸ Bérubé has noted that during World War Two, soldiers dressed in drag would often be propositioned by other men after performances. *Coming Out Under Fire*, 92–93.

night only, from a discourse of heroic contestation where stoicism and discipline were the expected structures of feeling. However, the over-exuberance of the party interrogates the necessity of such horseplay. Markham finishes his description of winter entertainments by stating: “Such were the sort of amusements which were considered absolutely necessary, and a part of every individual’s duty to promote, to drive away the *ennui* that might otherwise have seriously injured the bodily and mental health of the Expedition.”⁶⁹ This reads as highly questionable – was dressing up as Mayor of Griffith Island, arriving in a showy sedan-chair carried by eight slave boys, *absolutely necessary*? Did drinking until falling on the snow and measuring one’s penis length really drive away ennui? There is no doubt that these theatricals served a purpose during expeditions and were, for the most part, successful in countering winter malaise. However, the significant license they gave men to rematerialise their personas and explore other subjectivities, license most likely not readily available at home, and the gusto with which they took to it when given the chance, should not be left unquestioned.

The masked ball’s class disruptions were slight, compared to later American productions. A “promotion” of merely one rank, ship’s captain Ommanney usurped the fleet’s commander Austin, who – more importantly – tended the former’s feet (as bootblack), butt (as upholsterer), and soul (as missionary), referencing empire’s dubious Christianising mission. Thus, for a single night, Austin was utterly demoted, a momentary upending of the high command. But so-called bit players in the expedition (lesser officers and sailors) retained bit parts in this performance, pulling the sledge like dogs or slaves,

⁶⁹ Markham, *Franklin’s Footsteps*, 79.

masquerading as racial others such as Jews or Arabs, or mimicking regional outcasts such as Highlanders. Or, through significant gendered transformations, they dolled up as damsels or played washed-up old maids. Who were deemed lovely enough for the former? Who odious enough for the latter? Or, was high-contrast drag the order of the day – bulky, bearded men made ludicrous fair maidens, obvious pretty boys kitted out in widows’ black shawls? Regardless, and perhaps most importantly, these “women,” judged for comely attributes, would have figured prominently in the dancing – the waltzes and quadrilles which required, above all, *coupling*. Known far and wide, these popular dances of the period ensured dance-floor embraces and stagey movements arm in arm, whether in waltzing pairs or among four couples in quadrilles.

Furthermore, the sheer drunkenness of some of the men at the end of the night interrogates the hegemonic polar narrative of bodily might. The public considered polar explorers the epitome of manliness, heroic men who battled the physically draining environment of the Arctic and Antarctic to build country and muscle. As discussed in Chapter 3, this nationalistic masculinity was often conflated with homoerotic longing as men took to weight-lifting to combat winter malaise. However, the widespread inebriation of Austin’s fleet during the masquerade ball suggests that these men cared little about promoting a similar image on board. It directly interrogates Markham’s statement that polar ennui, “might otherwise have seriously injured *the bodily... health* of the Expedition,” because alcohol is known to cause bodily harm when drunk in significant quantities.⁷⁰ The “revellers” are described as refusing to go home, getting lost in the snowdrift – no laughing matter – and stumbling to the delight of onlookers.

⁷⁰ My emphasis.

This kind of self-inflicted maltreatment, perhaps even harm, disrupts the notion that explorers were hardy, fine-tuned men who continually readied themselves for grave perils and hardships. Instead, their image as exemplary, individualised empire builders becomes jaded: their allegedly superior physical might was diminished as they voluntarily consumed drink after drink, their intoxication reflective of a symbolic drunkenness with the self-aggrandising effects of white, colonial supremacy.

Overall, while polar expeditions were tightly run societies organised on the basic principle that moral vice was caused by darkness and illness, they could also be sites of libertinism where men could dress-up, drink and dance to their delight. Paradoxically, then, in their efforts to ward off “unpleasant consequences” the men created opportunities for same-sex desire not possible at home, exactly the kind of consequences they were trying to avoid.

The closing night of the Royal Arctic Theatre featured the reading of a poem, published in Markham’s narrative as, “The Epilogue: At the Close of the Season, at The Royal Arctic Theatre, 28th February, 1851.” Championing the successes of the theatre over the course of the “season,” the poem reads: “And in this mimic world the hours beguile, / Where all do feel the want of a woman’s smile. / But now ’tis o’er the flower of day expands, / And greedy time new sacrifice demands.”⁷¹ The new temporality superimposed on reality by the theatre ceased that night, the illusionary, carnivalesque world of pretty damsels and clown-like fears fading away with the daylight. In this mimic world, referring to both the perpetual, ghostly darkness and the marvellous, glittering stage, the woman’s smile lingered most, be it in drag or dream.

⁷¹ Markham, *Franklin’s Footsteps*, 144.

To conclude, the 1850s were the height of Arctic farce. Parry's influence on polar expeditions continued, with shipboard theatricals still, for the most part, a top-down process. However, as understandings of the pressures of polar society grew, the theatre changed to reflect this. The incredible scene of the masquerade ball, the epitome of polar cross-dressing and blackface, interrogates the hegemonic narratives of polar exploration, suggesting that when a Parry-esque hold on an expedition was loosened, the men came out to play.

“Then we sang negro songs” – American influences

American involvement in the Arctic began with the First Grinnell Expedition in 1850–51, commanded by Lieutenant Edwin De Haven. The diary of Elisha Kent Kane, the chief doctor on board, ignited a fascination with the Arctic among Americans. Kane's constant articulation of a scurvy epidemic vividly exposed the entrenched class lines of expeditions; his description of a night of “negro songs” represents a prototypical instance of polar blackface. This most enduring and racist cultural form would undergo potent alterations on icy shores, signalling the start of a paradoxical relationship between blackface and American nationalistic endeavours in the Arctic.

The search for Franklin not only inspired a new generation of Arctic exploration among the British, but also served as the initial impetus for American involvement in the region. In 1850, Lady Franklin wrote to President Zachary Taylor, pleading assistance in the search for her husband. Acquiescing to her ardent, eloquent call for help, Taylor sought congressional approval while Henry Grinnell, a wealthy ship merchant from New York, prepared two ships, the

Rescue and *Advance*, for a search-and-rescue mission. Led by Lieutenant Edwin De Haven, the two ships of 33 volunteer officers, sailors and doctors left America in May 1850 soon to become locked in the ice at Baffin Bay. Seeking refuge in Melville Bay, where Parry had wintered 30 years before, the expedition worked its way westward, making first American contact with the Inughuit of northern Greenland. In Lancaster Sound, the expedition, along with Horatio Austin's ships and others, found evidence of Franklin's wintering site on Beechey Island, where three graves stood marking the untimely death of sailors. De Haven's expedition soon became icebound for winter; during this long and dark period, the ships drifted with the ice through Baffin Bay and back out to the Atlantic.

Finding evidence of Franklin's presence in the Arctic stirred up interest back home in America; the much-hyped possibility that Franklin was still alive, marooned in the theorised Open Polar Sea above the ice, set men to work.⁷² Another expedition was shortly mounted. But the humanitarian gestures behind this initial involvement in the Arctic soon became secondary to a burgeoning, irrepressible nationalist desire for geographic discovery and colonial acquisition.

The genesis of American interest in the Arctic, which would continue on to Robert Peary's alleged conquering of the North Pole, is as much attributable to Lady Franklin's plea as it is to the published works of Elisha Kent Kane, the senior surgeon of the expedition, who was invited to write a history of the expedition after the reticent De Haven declined to offer anything more than an

⁷² The Open Polar Sea was a hypothesized ice-free ocean surrounding the North Pole. It was suggested that Franklin found entry into the ocean but had become locked in it. Kane was a strong proponent of this theory; a public lecture he gave on the Sea to the American Geographical and Statistical Society is reproduced in the back of his published narrative. Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 543–52.

official report.⁷³ Kane was a Philadelphia man and medical officer who quickly rose in the navy ranks through successful deployments to China, Africa and in the American-Mexican War. His relationship to the Arctic was complex: his fascination with the contortions and fancies of the ice were offset by a bubbling fear that the landscape would entrap him forever. Nevertheless, after returning from the First Grinnell Expedition, he would go on to lead a highly successful second American expedition, which overwintered at remarkably high latitude and made extensive contact with Inughuit communities that would go on to become the unrecognised backbone of Peary's achievements at the Pole.

Crucially, Kane inspired American involvement in the Arctic through his writing. His many geographic, scientific and ethnographic discoveries were expertly captured in thrilling accounts read widely on both sides of the Atlantic. "His gripping narratives, accompanied by the surreal engravings of arctic scenes... inspired a generation of adventurers, from Hayes to Peary, to continue in his path. Simultaneously, the immense popular appeal of Kane's books sparked an enduring fascination with the region, generating the necessary popular support to sustain the polar quest."⁷⁴ Kane's account of the First Grinnell Expedition certainly grips, though many of its fine articulations of polar expedition society aboard the *Rescue* and *Advance* were a continuation of polar literary traditions established by Parry at the beginning of the century.

Particularly interesting was Kane's relationship to the ice, which he saw as a prison. The equating of polar space with prison is a long-running theme throughout the literature of polar exploration, the dull, grey contours of ice

⁷³ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 15–16. De Haven's report is reproduced at the back of Kane's published account, 491–508, but offers little in the way of greater depth.

⁷⁴ Lyle Dick, *Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001), 162.

mimicking that of jail-cell walls. He described Barlow's Inlet as a "prison... an object of special aversion: the naked desolation of its frost-bitten limestone, the cavernous recess of its cliffs, the cheerlessness of its dark shadows, had connected it, from the first day I saw it, with some dimly-remembered feeling of pain."⁷⁵ At times, Kane and the men were unable to leave the ship on account of roving bears, which immobilised the crews like inmates, though he was fond of brandishing arms and shooting any living animal that moved.

Kane's attitude towards Inuit was as vitriolic as Parry's. His description of a first encounter reads: "The one feeling which, I venture to say, pervaded us all, to the momentary exclusion of everything else, was disgust." Even worse, he later described two Inuit men in grotesque, animalising terms: "Two men were there upon the land ice, gesticulating in grotesque and not very decent pantomime – genuine, unmitigated Esquimaux. Verging on 76° is a far northern limit for human life; yet these poor animals were as fat as the bears which we killed a few days ago."⁷⁶ The idea put forward earlier, that Inuit found avenues of resistance in performative actions such as chasing white men with foodstuffs declared "disgusting," is echoed here in Kane's description. The manner in which Inuit gesticulated – described as a pantomime – suggests playing up to and

⁷⁵ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 193.

⁷⁶ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 39, 132. Kane's use of the words "genuine" and "unmitigated" suggests that he viewed these Inuit as authentic representations of their people. Authenticity has long been a critical juncture in anthropology. Deloria has exposed authenticity as a culturally constructed category "created in opposition to a perceived state of inauthenticity." *Playing Indian*, 101. In other words, to label something authentic reveals more about the perceived state of inauthenticity of the labeller, who places value on the "real," the traditional and the organic in opposition to their own disappointing reality. The desire to engage with the authentic is a kind of fetishisation of the Other, not dissimilar to minstrelsy's historically ambiguous relationship with black people. I would stress, however, that authenticity also works systematically to immobilise groups of people. The allegedly desirable qualities of still-existent groups – traditional, anti-modern – serves to historicise these peoples, denying them their present identity. Though Kane's disgust at Inuit suggests he idealised little of their culture, his description of these Inuit as "genuine" renders these peoples as a kind of ahistorical, static exhibition that is denied agency, let alone the ability to progress by Western standards.

satirising prevailing Western stereotypes of Arctic peoples. By Kane's era, Inuit had had contact with Western polar expedition societies for some 30 years. In that time, it is certain they grew to understand Western contempt and deflect, or even reflect, it by "playing up" their alleged negative qualities to offend self-righteous, supremacist explorers and their men and, ultimately, attempt to forestall further Western encroachment.

Kane's conceit for those allegedly beneath him was also found in his practice of medicine. The main concern of his narrative was scurvy, which is hardly surprising considering his position as chief medical officer on the expedition. But the manner in which he worried about and described, very literarily, the incidences of this fear-inducing polar disease went far beyond professional concern for the health of the crews; rather, it fitted neatly into the polar tradition of probing one's mind and body (and those of others) for signs of moral and physical decay, decay that, as already argued, was tacitly thought to give way to non-normative sexual degeneracy. Scurvy first hit in December 1850 (not coincidentally, theatrical endeavours and their cheering effect followed that week). Kane began by noting in his diary:

In truth, we were all of us at this time undergoing changes unconsciously... Worse than this, our complete solitude, combined with permanent darkness, began to affect our *morale*. Men became moping, testy, and imaginative... In a word, the health of our little company was broken in upon. It required strenuous and constant effort at washing, diet, and exercise to keep the scurvy at bay. Eight cases of scorbutic gums were already on my black-list.⁷⁷

Kane's worrisome detailing of these changes interrogates the idea that they were in any way unconscious. In a manner similar to Parry, his upper-class

⁷⁷ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 267. Author's emphasis.

sensibilities and pretensions result in a paternalist responsibility over “the men,” who, like children, have their bodily functions systematised so that they are properly washed, fed and exercised – what Kane dubbed “sanitary discipline.” The process of eating was a particularly pronounced motif in Kane’s narrative, the ability to overcome disease by nutrition reflected in his sensual description of the returning light: “How delicious is this sensation of coming day!”⁷⁸

However, while Parry sat as the head of the expedition, acting as a calculating brain that controlled the functions of various body parts, Kane was more socially segregated. He was allegedly a man of science, a dispassionate observer, but – crucially – his loaded writings trouble the notion that American expedition society would be somehow more classless than its British counterparts. He wrote: “I have been for some evenings giving lectures on topics of popular science, the atmosphere, the barometer, &c., to the crew. They are not a very intellectual audience, but they listen with apparent interest, and express themselves gratefully.”⁷⁹ The alienating use of the third person plural, the rendering of the crew as unintelligent, the conceited remarks about *their* gratefulness: these choices of language affirm that Kane saw his social standing as above that of the lower-class sailors.

Bearing this in mind, his medicinal descriptions of disease seem to stem not from a position of empathetic, clinical care but rather from a kind of obsessive ethnographic interest in its progression and treatment. Indeed, the manner in which he documented outbreaks of scurvy on a “black-list” already reads as somewhat chilling. Later, he outlines specific cases of scurvy, each patient described with a hint of disdain: one particularly stubborn, one

⁷⁸ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 325, 288.

⁷⁹ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 240. In De Haven’s official report on the expedition, he noted that he deferred authority to Kane on the hygiene of the crew. 504.

“conservative” with his consumption of vegetables, and one “remarkable for a dirty person.”⁸⁰ His on-going ruminations on disease, therefore, become rather heartless, occluding the lower-class sailor’s well-being to describe scurvy as a fascinating but malevolent character that exists separate from its victim.

Later in the winter, Kane’s descriptions of the darkness and its diseases become even more pointedly classed, with the officers “determined, come what might, to maintain toward each other that honest courtesy of manner.” The lower decks did not share this politeness, as untrustworthy a description as it reads to the critical eye: “With the men, however, it was different. More deficient in the resources of education, and less restrained by conventional usages or the principles of honour from communicating to each other what they felt, all sympathized in the imaginary terrors which each one conjured up.”⁸¹

Two points stand out from this analysis of differing responses to disease: firstly, the “imaginary terrors” Kane described confirm exactly what was presented earlier: the kind of nervy, compulsive introspection that spooked men in the Arctic. Imaginary terrors, gloomy prospects, unpleasant consequences – these negative thought processes ran wild in the minds of men. While Kane attributes these “terrors” to the minds of the lower classes, his first-person narrative betrays his own fixation with idiosyncratic polar diseases throughout, their terrors becoming his terrors despite his protestations.

Secondly, the education of the lower decks was “deficient” enough (deficiency here resonating with the medical rhetoric of vitamin and mineral deficiency) for the men to share and sympathise over common ailments, worsening their problems. There is a moralistic tone here that pathologises “the

⁸⁰ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 326.

⁸¹ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 291.

men”; it pins the cause of polar malaise and scurvy to (un)intelligence and subsequent inadvertent bad behaviour. This is, of course, grossly unfair. These American sailors, regardless of rank, were traversing the Arctic for the first time, and no prior experience of symptoms would have existed. Why should reticence on the part of the officers, “principles of honour,” have equated to a better coping mechanism?

Kane’s quote widely exposes the entrenched class divisions that ran through all expeditions. Where later expedition narratives would become more nuanced in how they related class tensions, Kane’s documentation of the way in which men coped with polar ailments eschews ambiguity in favour of valorising the upper-class officers. Kane goes on to write, in a surprised tone, that it was not only the crew who suffered, but also the “commander, certainly the finest constitution among us, was assailed like the rest.”⁸² While Kane knew class boundaries, it seems scurvy did not. Where class affected suffering, however, some forms of recreation brought the men together. More specifically, the singing of minstrel songs proved a cohesive cultural signifier around which all class of men could convalesce.

Kane hinted at the centrality of performance to exploration when he described the light of the Arctic as characters belonging to a dramatic performance. “As the afternoon advanced, we had another visit of the phenomena of refraction. This time they passed before us in all the costumes and mutations of a carnival frolic. I am afraid to paint them from recollection, and would make an apology, if I could, for the seeming extravagance with which

⁸² Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 311.

they reflect themselves in my journal.”⁸³ If polar theatre is a fluid construct that coursed through the history of polar exploration with its own idiosyncrasies, then the American addition to the canon reflects a different national consciousness while maintaining some of the core components of freezing farce.

The theatre during the First Grinnell Expedition was a particularly campy affair, its inherent homoeroticism seeping through nearly every performance though differing in production from its British counterparts. Even Kane, who confessed he did not like the theatre, “a wretched simulation of realities,” found himself completely enthralled at the “tawdry quackery,” the first performance of the *Blue Devils* being “very, very funny.”⁸⁴ The tomfoolery of actors forgetting their lines or overacting in a “high-tragedy monotone of despair,” boiled any nuance in the drama down to two core components: the provision of light-hearted relief and the cathartic processing of same-sex desire.

In the first performance, which by all accounts was a shoddy mess totally unlike the polished British equivalents during Parry and Markham’s expeditions, the men in drag excited the audience, the ridiculousness of costumes providing a cover for consensual same-sex desire to course freely from actor to audience and back again. As Kane explained: “Megrim, with a pair of seal-skin boots, bestowed his gold upon the gentle Annette; and Annette, nearly six feet high, received it with mastodonic grace. Annette was an Irishman named Daly; and I might defy human being to hear her, while balanced on the heel of her boot, exclaim, in rich masculine brogue, ‘Och, feather!’ without roaring.”⁸⁵ Daly’s representation of womanhood was rather coarse, an exemplar of the comic high-contrast drag that co-existed alongside fey young men’s more convincing

⁸³ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 126.

⁸⁴ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 269.

⁸⁵ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 269.

performances of effeminacy. This suggests that, on the one hand, the audience's desire for this "gentle" but masculine woman reflected a disregard for stricter gender lines in favour of a more fluid, ambiguous sexualisation. On the other, the display of both masculine and feminine qualities may have negated the possibility of desire altogether for Annette, as she affirmed a strict gender binary through her bluntness. Annette was, after all, a tall, large man playing an especially feminised woman. Nevertheless, both her masculine gruffness and her gentle grace would have reinforced familiar bodily ableness – men were men, women were women, no bodies were falling apart – providing a sense of normalcy, a strictly gendered concept, to an audience undergoing corporeal suffering and rehabilitation.⁸⁶ Whatever Annette signified, the pains that the actors portraying daintily clad "women" had to go through did not go unappreciated. The sailor's serious dedication to drag in freezing temperatures, which proved their masculine hardiness, is suggested as such: "Poor Jen suffered so much in her bare sleeves and hands."⁸⁷

Annette's gruffer appearance also suggests that the sailors felt less need to represent and cherish a middle- or upper-class definition of womanhood than their British counterparts, though other female characters during the expedition would be less ambiguous. The return of the sun on 30 January 1851 was a particular cause for celebration, being a "more holy day than Christmas or All-Saints." To mark the special occasion, the talented Robert Bruce, a crewman from the *Rescue*, produced the first American play written in the Arctic, *The Country-man's first Visit to Town*. Though there is no extant record of the plot or script, it was billed as a "comic play" and was deemed "altogether creditable" –

⁸⁶ Serlin, "Crippling Masculinity," 171.

⁸⁷ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 305.

clearly trading, in its very title, on the long-established urban ridicule of country-comes-to-town hayseed stereotypes, bumbling through countless incomprehensible big-city quandaries. Following the debut of this “*divertissement* of domestic composition” was a pantomime, which Kane records as:

An old man (Mr. Bruce) possessed mysterious, semi-magical, and wholly comical influence over a rejected lover (M. Auguste Canot, ship’s cook), and Columbine (Mr. Smith) exercised the same over the old man. Harlequin (Mr. Johnson), however, by the aid of a split-shingle wand and the charms of his “motley wear,” secures the affections of Columbine, cajoles the old man, persecutes the forlorn lover, and carries off the prize of love; the fair Columbine, who had been industriously chewing tobacco, and twirling on the heel of her boot to keep herself warm, giving him a sentimental kiss as she left the stage.⁸⁸

Evidently, the kind of queer tension that ran through polar expeditions once again shaped the course of theatricals during this expedition. But where British polar farce was influenced by a genealogy of men who employed, from the top down, cross-dressing as a means to disperse the onset of depression and/or aggression, the American performances during Kane’s expedition suggested that the need for sexual gratification stemmed from the sailors themselves. As Isbell has noted in her study of American shipboard theatricals: “Shipboard performance is fundamentally an amateur endeavor, permitted, perhaps encouraged by those in charge, but never mandatory. It is kept alive by the sailors’ enthusiasm for performance.”⁸⁹ Lower-class men created opportunities to tease gender boundaries through sartorial, sexualised play,

⁸⁸ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 294–96.

⁸⁹ Isbell, “P(l)aying off Old Ironsides,” 9. Isbell’s analysis, as she notes, does not fit the tradition of British theatricals presented above, where the upper tiers of expedition society did not so much endorse theatre as actually produce it, suggesting a greater desire for control over potentially subversive performative endeavours.

suggesting less fear over the theatre's subversive potential from above or more tactic acceptance of homoeroticism in all-male societies. This affirms a long history of homosocial groups of men in unsettled lands spontaneously appearing in drag to amuse and titillate one another, now forgotten due to an overbearing frontier ideology in national discourse that sought to eradicate or explain away cross-dressing in supposedly hyper-masculine histories.⁹⁰ The sexual connotations in the Harlequin's "split-shingle wand," the outright display of affection in the "sentimental kiss" and the fact that the Columbine was played by James Smith, renowned during the winter for being the "heroine of the Thespian corps" – these articulations of same-sex desire came not from De Haven or the officers, but from the men themselves, "the arrangements exclusively their own."⁹¹

Interestingly, it is clear that Smith's ability to play women, or his desire to, was noted among the men from his nickname, the "heroine" of the theatre. It suggests that the expedition consciously signalled Smith out for his effeminacy or fine features, "casting decisions exploiting personality traits of well-known performers."⁹² His social function was to appear as a woman during an expedition that segregated itself from the female sex, thereby exposing its paradoxical gendered discourses. Even more curious: the copy of the playbill, originally tacked against the mast of the boat, appears in Kane's published account. Towards the bottom of the bill, the stage manager announces: "No admittance to Children; and no Ladies admitted without an escort."⁹³ Though most likely nothing but a passing joke, the fact that *no* children were to be

⁹⁰ Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past*, 6–7.

⁹¹ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 364, 266.

⁹² Isbell, "P(l)aying off Old Ironsides," 11.

⁹³ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 295.

admitted but ladies *could* at least offers a tantalising hope that perhaps some of the audience felt inclined to attend in drag, with a man on arm as escort.

The American influence on the canon of polar performance, the more democratic, rougher nature in which plays were staged, is made all the more obvious through the Arctic debut of the most popular cultural form in America in the nineteenth century: blackface. Though Kane's men did not, most likely, black-up during their time on ice, they nevertheless did pay homage to the minstrel show on one distinct occasion.⁹⁴ During December 1850, when spirits were at an all-time low, the men took to alcohol and hearty singing to try and combat the, "depressing influences of each man's home thoughts." On the 25th, the mood started low, with Kane lamenting the lack of "communion of loved sympathies" among the men, but after joking and laughing incessantly (perhaps somewhat forcibly so) spirits began to rise: "We drank up a moiety of our Heidsiek [sic]; and then we sang negro songs, wanting only tune, measure, and harmony, but abounding in noise; and after a closing bumper to Mr. Grinnell, adjourned with creditable jollity from table to the theatre."⁹⁵ Though only mentioned in passing, these "negro songs" can hardly be ignored: they are the beginning of racist, grotesque representations of African-Americans in polar spaces.

Earlier, Kane distanced himself from "the men" through pseudo-anthropological assumptions that the upper-class men were somehow better able to cope with diseases. Furthermore, though he enjoyed the theatre immensely, Kane continually reminded his readers that this recreational activity was

⁹⁴ On 14 February 1851, the theatre did put on a performance of Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, which does have black characters in it, though Kane makes no reference to their representation on stage. Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 304.

⁹⁵ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 268.

exclusively arranged by the lower decks so as to create distance between himself and this occasionally gaudy pastime. But on Christmas Day in 1850, Kane dropped these pretensions and, in unity with the crew, fought the onset of depression by sharing in alcohol, laughter and music. The “negro songs” of Christmas Day were a particularly potent cultural signifier around which the American men could assemble. The segregated crew were able to eschew their class divisions and cohere around the subjugated African-American, the racially defined Other reminding the men that whatever their differences in material possession and education, they enjoyed the presumption of white identity.⁹⁶

Though it is not known which songs were sung that night, in *Passed* Midshipman Robert Randolph Carter’s published account of the expedition, he notes that they were: “Patriotic and sentimental.”⁹⁷ As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, plantation songs made popular by Stephen Foster would resonate deeply with the lower decks of polar expeditions for their depictions of suffering but faithful slaves, providing a figurative language for the sailors with which to describe and vent their own afflictions while keeping racial hierarchies firmly in place. Here however, it is sufficient to note that these “sentimental” songs would have no doubt reminded the men of home. That they chose racially offensive songs about African-Americans as a means to conjure up nostalgic feelings reads as particularly troubling: it suggests the institutionalisation of black pain elicited a positive emotional response, a yearning for the comforts and contours of systematised racism while living in a liminal, frozen land where most known social and environmental realities had

⁹⁶ Mahar has shown that antebellum minstrelsy did hold wide appeal in American society, with major companies in the middle of the century tapping into varied audiences as a means to boost profit from attendance. *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 27.

⁹⁷ Robert Carter, *Search for the Franklin Expedition: The Journal of Robert Randolph Carter* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 108.

been turned unreal by the dominating environment. Worse yet, the men sang the songs on one of the most important Christian days of the year, the story of the birth of Jesus Christ and his mission of brotherhood and forgiveness not far from their minds surely.

This picture is complicated because these songs were, in fact, attributed to black society by the whites that sung them. While their inherent racism may have made them comforting to the crew, the very fact of their association with “blackness” suggests that however repulsed by African-Americans they were, the men saw racially defined Others as part of the make up of their national consciousness. They turned the African-American Others into “symbolic figures that could be rhetorically interior to the society they sought to inaugurate.”⁹⁸ These songs were, as stated, both sentimental *and* patriotic – they were regarded as a distinctly American phenomenon. It is telling that after the singing of the minstrel songs, the men went on to give a rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” the national anthem and the “negro song” sitting side by side in a night of nationalistic reverence.⁹⁹ The expedition, ostensibly a search-and-rescue mission, created an enduring fascination and colonial interest with the Arctic. The heroic endeavours of the men and their subsequent narrativisation by Kane helped construct new, imperialist ideas of American nationhood both at home and in the Arctic. But in these embryonic moments of geographic and symbolic expansion, the men felt compelled to include commodified “black” cultural formations – American flags planted to the soundtrack of slavery.

Furthermore, at a time when scurvy was decimating the men by forcing the reliving of previous injury and pain, the nostalgic, sentimental spectre of the

⁹⁸ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 22.

⁹⁹ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 269.

suffering black body was conjured as a cultural assemblage around which to gather. Perhaps the projection of black corporeal failings, brought on by the hands of whites, allowed the men to tap into feelings of pain, to cathartically work through the diseases dismantling their bodies. But any moment of identification with black pain was a one-way, conceited process, the sentimentalisation of plantations and the sanitisation of their history precluding any understanding of suffering. After the night of homesickness, songs and laughter, the men continued to cheer their spirits, the minstrel songs soon forgotten but their powerful effects still lingering. “In fact, we were very happy fellows. We had had a foot-race in the morning over the midnight ice for three purses of a flannel shirt each, and a splicing of the main-brace. The day was night, the stars shining feebly through the mist.”¹⁰⁰

To conclude, believing that the uneducated would excite themselves with “imaginary terrors,” Kane exposed the harrowing introspection suffered by sailors while at the same time pathologising it based on shipboard hierarchies, hierarchies shared in common by British and American expeditions. The theatre, however, was an altogether more democratic and occasionally gaudy affair, departing from the British upper-class image of how drama should be produced and performed. The “negro songs” proved to be a fitting American contribution to the canon of polar performance: through ridicule of the black Other, the segregated crew was momentarily able to unify on Christmas Day, the commodification of “black” culture so paramount to white American identity that it was brought thousands of miles to Arctic shores.

¹⁰⁰ Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition*, 270. To “splice the main-brace” is a naval term for giving, by order, a measure of alcohol to each crewmember.

Conclusion

In 1852, Captain Edward Belcher led the last Admiralty expedition in search of John Franklin, a huge effort spanning a fleet of five ships including the *Assistance* and *Resolute*. During the winter, the Queen's Arctic Theatre was held on a washhouse on shore built of snow blocks, which, unfortunately, produced so much condensation that clouds obscured the actors on stage.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the theatricals were still elaborate affairs advertised with intricate playbills printed on satin. On Christmas Day, a "state carriage" driven by the "Queen's coachman" in full uniform picked up a surprised Captain Belcher from his cabin. Knowing he had a "part in the Play to perform," he was driven to the *Pioneer* by 12 huskies, where, assuming his "proper character," he kicked off the Christmas celebrations: "Rather pantomimic the change! Stepping on her decks I was metamorphosed, in less time than Harlequin's wand could effect it, into my proper self, received and returned the salutes, inspected the men, and sent them below."¹⁰² Such pompous ceremony was to be the last for some time; British interest in the search for Franklin dwindled after Belcher's expedition failed to locate him. American explorers, as discussed in the following chapter, took up the cause and with it they changed the course of polar theatricals by bringing with them racially fraught performances of blackface.

The Royal Arctic Theatre surfaced twice more: once, in the winter of 1875–76, when the theatre went further north than ever before during British Navy Captain George Nares' attempt for the North Pole. Clements Markham

¹⁰¹ Dunbar, "The Royal Arctic Theatre," 112.

¹⁰² Edward Belcher, *The Last of the Arctic Voyages, Being a Narrative of the Expedition In H.M.S. Assistance, Under the Command of Captain Sir Edward Belcher, Volume I* (London: Lovell Reeve, 1855), 190–91.

accompanied the expedition, clearly besotted with polar exploration and the raucous fun it promised, and recorded in his diary the course of the particularly active theatre. Performances featured more racial caricatures, a “lovely oriental princess” both recalling the male High Priest of Japan and suggesting awareness of additional forms of gendered relations and ridicule as the empire expanded.¹⁰³ After the Nares expedition, the Royal Arctic Theatre would never open its doors on Arctic ice again, but its Antarctic guise, the Royal Terror Theatre, was profoundly popular during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration.

This chapter has argued that the performance tradition of polar theatre was a fluid construct that developed over the course of 60 years from its beginnings in the first two decades of the nineteenth century to the winter of 1875–76. It has focused on three particular moments in polar farce’s history: William Edward Parry’s path-breaking expeditions to find the fabled Northwest Passage; the search for John Franklin through Clements Markham’s writing; the first American expedition to the Arctic where Elisha Kent Kane was surgeon and chief chronicler.

Tracking changes and continuities in performances, it has argued that behind polar exploration was a genealogy of homoerotic play. Parry’s pedantic control over the bodily functions of his men was designed to ward off “unpleasant consequences,” which I argued were the spectre of non-normative sexual relations. As such, the performances put on at the Royal Arctic Theatre readily addressed the fact that men had not seen women for months. During Markham’s winter on the ice, the men rematerialised their personas during a gaudy masquerade ball, when opportunities for same-sex contact were most

¹⁰³ Clements Markham, *The Great Frozen Sea: A Personal Narrative of the Voyage of the Alert During the Arctic Expedition of 1875-6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 197.

likely acted upon as drunken men in drag danced two and two. In Kane's expedition, the sailors themselves put on rougher shows where traditional gender lines were more blurred but the sexualised gaze remained the same.

As expeditions grew more sophisticated and explorers had a better understanding of the environmental and societal pressures of polar living through a common body of text, the theatre became more sophisticated. One need only compare the domestically written performances of Parry and Markham's theatre. Clearly, polar theatre reflected the fears and anxieties of the officers and sailors, who became immobilised subjects in a dominating environment. Throughout all these expeditions, farce and comedy were especially prominent, reflecting the theatre's curative affects in a society prone to depression. It is likely that captains and theatre managers considered tragedies ill-fitting. However, while the theatre's capacity to placate a polar society that had its own rules and conventions was one of its greatest assets, it can also be regarded as an instrument of colonial enterprise, restoring physical and mental health so that more space could be traversed, more Inuit ridiculed and, ultimately, more heroes essentialised by celebratory, nationalistic discourses both contemporary and future.

I have also exposed the heavily classed nature of polar exploration, a hitherto underexplored aspect. A closer look at the literature reveals that entrenched class lines created different experiences during winters. From Parry's top-down, procedural management of his crew, to the 128 men lost under Franklin's command as he attempted to vindicate his own upper-class failings, to Kane's pathologising of "the men" due to their lack of education, exploration societies have always been classed enterprises with an individualised, "heroic"

man at the helm. These class lines were also reflected in the theatre: though sailors took part in productions, their involvement was always sanctioned by the upper class. In British examples, the upper class actually put on and produced most performances. As such, there was slight opportunity for social critique of society on board polar exploration ships, though as Chapters 3 and 4 show, this would change with the turn of the twentieth century.

In sum, polar performance was a tradition passed on through written and oral capacities, impressing upon militarised, masculine spheres of nationalistic activity a divergent history of cross-dressing and blackface.

Chapter 2

“Smith, à la negro!”: Blackface, Americanisation, Inuit womanhood and Charles Francis Hall’s first Arctic expedition

During his first autumn in the Arctic in 1860, Charles Francis Hall had tea with a female Inuk. It was a remarkable scene, there “amid the snows of the North, under an Esquimaux’s hospitable tent, in company with Esquimaux,” sipping on his hot drink with a seemingly “civilised” woman. Overjoyed at her apparent good-natured domesticity, Hall exclaimed: “for the first time I shared with them in that soothing, invigorating emblem of civilization – T-E-A!”¹ This was only one of many times that Hall became overwhelmed at Inuit women’s ability to produce and perform recognisable emblems of (Western) civilisation. In fact, during the course of his two-year stay in the Arctic, he became assured that women *were* emblems of civilisation and that if Inuit were to heed to his own representations of correct and incorrect womanhood, they could achieve racial progress of the American kind.

This chapter argues that images of womanhood and blackface representations were crucial to the American colonial project, taking as a case study Charles Francis Hall’s first expedition to the Arctic in 1860–62. Hall, on a search-and-rescue expedition for John Franklin’s lost expedition, which left Britain in 1845, spent two winters with local Inuit at Frobisher Bay in what is now Northern Canada. In 1864 he published a best-selling account of the expedition by the long-winded name of *Arctic Researches, and Life Among the*

¹ Charles Hall, *Arctic Researches, and Life Among the Esquimaux: Being the Narrative of an Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin, in the Years 1860, 1861, and 1862* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 162.

Esquimaux: Being the Narrative of an Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin, in the Years 1860, 1861, and 1862, which has since been described as containing “popular, dismayingly racist and pseudo-anthropological accounts of the Inuit.”² Though certainly a fair description of some of his writing, Hall’s relationships with Inuit were, in some ways, more respectful than those of his contemporaries. He was one of the first polar explorers to see value in adopting Inuit methods of survival. Where previous expedition leaders stubbornly tried to live in spite of the Arctic, Hall successfully lived off it, eating, sleeping and occasionally starving as Inuit did.³

Nevertheless, Hall, a religious zealot, was a colonialist at heart and sure of the local Inuits’ potential to be moulded if not forced into good Christian servants – just as his British imperial predecessors had strong-armed tea growers in the so-called East Indies and enslaved Africans to produce sugar in the West Indies, yielding the “civilised” rituals of tea. Nowhere did Hall’s colonial aspirations lie more than in the bodily comportment of women of Frobisher Bay. Throughout the course of his stay, he continually expressed pleasure when Inuit women wore Western dresses or knitted – alleged emblems of civilisation that served to differentiate them in an otherwise insufficient separation of sexes. I argue that Hall saw potential for development among his “children of the icy North,” but only when the females became thoroughly gendered to his standards: for Inuit to be “Americanized,” as Hall put it, for them to progress, the female

² Moss, *Scott’s Last Biscuit*, 162.

³ Chauncey Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores: The Story of Charles Francis Hall, Explorer* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 23. Hall’s influence in this respect was substantial. Where British expeditions would continue to emphasise the importance of heroic suffering instead of pragmatic solutions to severe temperatures, American involvement in the Arctic would follow established Inuit custom. However, this is often read positively with no acknowledgement of the host of colonial complexities that occurred when American explorers took Inuit women for wives and changed the nature of their work from family-orientated to explorer-orientated food production. Pálsson, “Hot Bodies in Cold Zones,” 4.

population would need to subscribe to a social construction of femininity based on subordination.⁴

Hall's fascination with the women was epitomised through his reverence of Tookoolito, an Inuk woman that had previously travelled outside the Arctic. She was, in Hall's mind, a germ of civilisation in the still-savage soil and ice, and, as such, Hall took it upon himself to educate her in Christian belief. I suggest that Hall's Christian, colonial sentiments cannot be extricated from discourses of hygiene: both dogmas emphasise human power over the natural. Tookoolito fostered progress among her people because in keeping her body clean, she had begun to sanitise herself of the natural world to which her people allegedly belonged.

However, Hall's mission to refine and educate the women becomes complicated when taking a closer examination of his private journals, which reveal a level of titillation with Inuit women and sexualised interests that could not be articulated in his published work. I suggest that his ruminations on the size of Inuit's breasts, which he likened to udders, served to exoticise and dehumanise the women, to render them as legitimisers of their own colonisation. As much as Hall extolled the virtues of "his" northern people, he could not deny his own sexualised, colonial politics that placed the white male over and above all racially and sexually defined Others. I argue that in wanting to install a management of the sexes among Inuit of Frobisher Bay, the sexualised discourses of the West were being refracted through imperial grounds, spaces that often remain neglected in Foucauldian thought.

⁴ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 183.

There was, however, another woman important to Hall's colonial ambitions – a woman of sorts, that is. Smith, one of the 29 whalers who travelled to the Arctic along with Hall, cross-dressed and blacked-up during a night of cross-cultural exchange between whalers and Inuit. Smith allegedly terrified the audience, his “negress” being likened to an evil apparition. Her appearance in the narrative, I argue, was raised as direct comparison to the civilised lady of Hall's colonial imagination. Hall's preoccupation with de-androgenising and domesticating the women can be neatly aligned with the exoticised depiction of the “negress,” who occupied a symbolic position of unchecked sensuality in the supremacist imagination. Taken together, they represented a strategy of projecting American assumptions of gender and race onto the local population.

I argue that the “negress” was offered to Inuit, seen as potential colonial subjects, as a marker of white authority and disqualified American citizenship at a time when American national identity was in significant flux due to the Civil War. She represented the power of the white man to enter and control black and female bodies. However, even as the “negress” displayed notions of white supremacy, she served to establish a black oppositionality against which Inuit could one day define themselves if subsumed into the American project. Further still, the “negress” exposed the contradictions inherent in showcasing “black” culture as an example of American culture in a space identified by Hall as being suitable for the construction of white colonialism.

There were, in sum, multiple racial discourses in play, complicated further by the fact that the “negress” was not the only racial performance on show that night: the alleged terror of the Inuit audience was equally heavily filtered through layers of colonial sentiment and served as a reflexive

narrativisation of Hall's own attitudes superimposed onto a third racial categorisation. The scene would have underscored for both spectators and readers the ostensibly dangerous nature of black, female rebellion and the purportedly childlike nature of Inuit temperament, as well as the indigenous "noble savages" of the American West. I suggest that this popular narrative became a means of naturalising the realities of Arctic colonialism, in turn producing ill will between two racially defined Others in the American colonial imaginary as a method of control over both.

Finally, I argue that blackface, typically considered a racial performance that speaks to black-white binaries in the context of America, is complicated by the addition of a third racialised subject to the narrative and the setting of its occurrence: outside the metropole. Released from the usual racial dyad to which it is tethered, blackface becomes a strategy of imparting the values of colonisers to subjects: in displaying white supremacy and black subordination, the "negress" served to instil in Inuit American prejudices and forewarn against racial insubordination. Viewed this way, black bodies were used as a method of racial policing in colonial sites. Broadly speaking, the propensity for dramatics enjoyed by polar explorers should be viewed as anything but benign or merely reactionary forms of entertainment. Instead, they undoubtedly affected relations with local Inuit populations. These sexualised, racialised theatrical entertainments, often reflecting the hyper-masculine, nationalised nature of expeditions, could also act as sites of transference for the dominant prejudices of colonisers.

“After some patient toil, glorious fruits must follow”

Hall was born in Rochester, New Hampshire, in 1821. Like many white, male New Englanders of his time, he drifted west into obscurity only to emerge some years later as a relatively successful entrepreneur at the heart of a growing commercial town: Hall first appeared in Cincinnati records in 1849, working as a seal-die moulder.⁵ He was vested in the industrial and commercial growth of the town, rubbing shoulders with men such as Governor Salmon Chase and revelling in its dynamic, enterprising spirit.

Hall was, in no uncertain terms, a fanatical man. He had an ability to devote himself entirely to a cause at the behest of everything he had previously invested in. Before his obsession with the Arctic had even begun, he had been a blacksmith, an engraver and had created his own company only to lose interest and found a newspaper, *The Cincinnati Occasional*, which he edited, published and distributed himself. New inventions and technologies fascinated him: he was an avid balloon enthusiast and devoted entire segments of his newspaper to trumpeting the technological invention. He once dropped 1,000 copies of the *Occasional* from a balloon over Cincinnati as a publicity stunt.⁶ Throughout all his many obsessions and enterprises he kept dozens of journals, where he energetically and dutifully recorded every high and low he felt, liberally using capital letters, oversized exclamation marks and arrows to emphasise his points.

Hall was a devout Christian, surely Protestant, which gave him a strong sense of personal conviction in all his eccentric endeavours.⁷ He strictly observed

⁵ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 26.

⁶ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 33-34.

⁷ I have been unable to find evidence of Hall's denomination in his personal journals or any of the secondary literature. There were puritanical qualities to his faith: he was a keen abstainer of

the Sabbath, did not drink or gamble, and spoke with such fiery passion that others would be drawn to his commanding presence. His journals often read as an internal dialogue with God, a tone that characterised even his first impressions of the Arctic environment: “I love the snows, the ices, icebergs, the fauna, and the flora of the North! I love the circling sun, the long day, *the arctic night, when the soul can commune with God in silence and reverential awe!* I am on a mission of love. I feel to be in the performance of a duty I owe to mankind – myself – God!”⁸ Hall’s religiosity, in particular his puritanical denials, rituals, and sense of manifest destiny, would later effect the manner of his missionary activity with the Inuit community at Frobisher Bay.

A far darker side to Hall’s personality offset his seemingly endless reserve of enthusiasm for new things. There was a pervasive insecurity to his character that resulted in a highly charged touchiness: he was overly sensitive, quick to take offense, argumentative, stubborn, depressive. He frequently fell out with business partners and friends alike, always preferring his own independence in undertakings so as to not be dependent on any other. Even his wife Mary and their children were seemingly inconsequential to him. He was prone to writing quotes of moral uplift in his journals when down or frustrated with the world, which he would regard as a dark place as much as he revelled in its brilliance.

There is no record as to when Hall became interested in the Arctic. American interest in polar exploration began in the 1850s during the initial search for John Franklin’s lost expedition, as outlined in the previous chapter.

vices such as alcohol and a strict observer of practice, suggesting Protestantism, but it has proved exceedingly difficult to pinpoint his religious affiliations further.

⁸ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 35. Unless otherwise stated, all emphases are the author’s. In his biographer’s words, Hall was “a fanatical notebook keeper prone to heavy underlining and strings of capital letters and pointing fingers drawn in the margins.” Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, xiv.

Franklin's wife, Lady Jane, a formidable character, petitioned the American government for help with the search, writing a pleading letter to President Zachary Taylor in 1850. The first American expedition, led by Lieutenant Edwin De Haven, left shortly after.

Subsequent search-and-rescue expeditions mounted in the same decade became increasingly concerned with inching further north as they were with locating Franklin. Their popular narratives, read by wide audiences, ignited an enduring fascination with the north among Americans. The Civil War, as costly and destructive as it was, could not curtail an encroaching expansionist sentiment among European-American populations long since accustomed to the systematic westward theft of native lands. Over the course of the 1860s, the ideological climate began turning in favour of likewise moving northward, planting the American flag on Arctic soil and ice.⁹ Isaac Hayes, whose expedition to find the open sea coincided in timing with that of Hall, was the first to propose establishing an American colony on Ellesmere Island for the sake of science and geographic discovery. Hayes believed that Americans could "colonize a part of hunters and natives as permanent support."¹⁰ Only weeks into his expedition, Hall himself would proclaim the virtues of having colonies in the Arctic. In the decades following Hall's expedition, American nationalistic interest in the Arctic would continue to grow rapidly until Robert Peary achieved the North Pole in the first decades of the twentieth century through the crucial yet unrecognised help of entire Inuit villages under his command.

At some point in this growing clamour over polar exploration, Hall became an Arctic fanatic. Claiming he had received a calling from God, he

⁹ Dick, *Muskox Land*, 164.

¹⁰ Isaac Hayes, "Address on Arctic Exploration," *Journal of the American Geographical and Statistical Society of New York* 2:2 (1870): 23, cited in Dick, *Muskox Land*, 182.

announced an expedition in search of Franklin after all official attempts from Britain and America had ended and hope of finding survivors had burned out. Hall was not one to be discouraged; though a decade had passed since Franklin set sail, he firmly believed it was his divine destiny to solve the mystery of the expedition's disappearance. Others, however, did not share his conviction. Despite early support from Governor Chase and other notable figures from Cincinnati's high society, Hall managed to secure only a meagre amount of funding for his expedition. His initial plan, to command a large expedition of two ships, was quickly diminished as the expensive realities of polar exploration sunk in.

Hall did secure the support of Henry Grinnell, head of one of the strongest mercantile houses in New York. Grinnell, one of the founders and first presidents of the American Geographical and Statistical Society (now the American Geographical Society), was the "patron saint of American activities in the Arctic." He had previously organised and funded two expeditions to the Arctic in search of Franklin, the first being that of De Haven and Elisha Kent Kane. Nevertheless, Hall suffered setback after setback in preparing for his expedition, in true Hall fashion spectacularly falling out with captains, funders and even fellow colonialist Hayes, about whom he wrote: "I pity his cowardice & weakness... I spurn his TRICKERY! – his DEVILTRY!!"¹¹

After months of uncertainty, Hall presented Grinnell with a new plan and a budget, greatly reduced from his initial grandiose ambitions: Hall was to take

¹¹ Archives Center, Hall Collection, cited in Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 46, 54. As Loomis notes, the manuscripts in the Hall Collection at the Archives Center, Washington D.C., are in poor condition, being mostly uncatalogued and unnumbered. Therefore, I draw heavily on Loomis' own research, quoting Hall's private journals as they appear in Loomis' book. Unfortunately, Loomis' own referencing does not give dates and cannot be page specific, for the reason given above. Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 333–34.

passage on a whaler, the *George Henry*, to Baffin Island, where he would hire a crew of Inuit and take a small boat to King William Island to search for survivors. Grinnell approved and agreed to cover a significant portion of Hall's costs, which by now had been reduced to a measly \$980 in light of the repeated difficulties Hall had faced, a figure itself down from a previously scaled-back budget of \$3,000.¹² Though no record exists of Hall's initial budget, his plan to sail two ships through Lancaster Sound would have been astronomically high in comparison. With the help of a few more donations, even from his own forgotten wife who contributed \$27, he was set for the Arctic, the tribulations of preparing the expedition only affirming his own courage and resolve.

Hall left New London, Connecticut, on 29 May 1860 with 29 male whalers on the *George Henry*. Only weeks into his expedition, Hall was already fostering ideas that Inuit could become law-abiding, permanently settled, Christian citizens. Before arriving at Frobisher Bay, the *George Henry* harboured at Holsteinborg, Danish Greenland, for several weeks. Inuit there, resettled in houses (instead of traditional igloos and snow-insulated tents) and earning individual wages (instead of collectivised hunting and gathering), impressed him so much that he became sure that America should follow a similar path of radical socio-economic transformation of other "dusky sons of an arctic clime." He would later cite the Danish model of acquisition in his own designs for the people of Frobisher Bay, who, he believed, "really deserve the attention of the philanthropist and Christian. Plant among them a colony of men and women

¹² Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 57.

having right-minded principles, and, after some patient toil, glorious fruits must follow.”¹³

Though he extolled the noble and great nature of Inuit subjectivity, the fruits that interested Hall seemed mostly fiscal in nature. When ruminating on Denmark’s control of Greenland, Hall calculated that despite the salaries of governors, teachers, priests and other officials, the net profit of such a colony, rich in seal blubber and shark livers, “exceeded ten thousand dollars, federal money, per annum!”¹⁴ Delighting in his sums, and the fact that the Inuit community of Holsteinborg seemed comfortable and happy in their colonial homes and schools, Hall left the town converted to the colonial model of acquisition. He believed it to benefit all parties involved, and urged his countrymen to take action as soon as the opportunity should arise. However, Hall’s conclusions had shaky foundations. Colonisers had subjected the Inuit community of Holsteinborg to “civilising” processes since the eighteenth century, when Danish missionaries arrived in Greenland. Only after much Christianisation did they call themselves Greenlanders, though the resident governor’s description of the high incidence of alcoholic consumption to Hall suggests anything but a fortuitous relationship with Western influence, a fact that Hall speedily brushed over in the narrative. Hall was somewhat misguided in believing similar fiscal and faith outcomes could be quickly found in the Canadian North, “the uncivilized, unexplored North – the Arctic wilderness.”¹⁵

Hall arrived at Frobisher Bay believing, as all Western explorers did at the time, that it was a channel leading onto King William Island. He later discovered, through “truly wonderful” Inuit knowledge of geography, that it was

¹³ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 138.

¹⁴ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 138.

¹⁵ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 69.

in fact an inlet that offered no possibility of passage.¹⁶ Incorrectly assuming he could sail a small boat down the “strait,” his search-and-rescue plans were soon thwarted when a severe storm left his expedition boat in tatters. Moreover, his late-autumn arrival made departure so close to winter dangerous. Finally, to his eternal frustration, the Inuit group he chose to use as help, those that lived near and occasionally among the whalers at Frobisher Bay, were more interested in hunting than assisting him on his quest. Hall took these setbacks in his stride, deciding to live among the local people so that he could harden himself for future exploration in the Arctic.¹⁷ He dutifully lived as they did, partaking in feasts of seal blood that would make other explorers of his time balk at the “barbarity.” Though he found no trace of Franklin’s survivors, over the next two years Hall spent his time making rudimentary scientific observations, planting American flags and discovering relics of Martin Frobisher’s expedition in the sixteenth century.

In summary, the eccentric Hall announced an expedition to the Arctic in search of John Franklin despite the fact that 15 years had passed since Franklin left Britain. Hall soon became enraptured with the Arctic, reading its natural wonders through his intense religiosity. His Christianising mission, however, was inextricably interwoven with the fiscal rewards of colonisation, long typical of European and European-American expansionism. It was with this new mindset that he arrived in Frobisher Bay.

¹⁶ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 126.

¹⁷ Fisch-Davis has argued that Hall lived among Inuit to prove that survivors of Franklin’s expedition could still be alive, doing the same. As such, she reads Hall’s two-year interaction with Inuit as an “extended performance,” a demonstration of the viability of his hypothesis that Franklin’s men survived. *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 120.

“Kimmiloo has just been Americanized”

Despite recognising the value in Inuit survival methods, Hall never stopped attempting to Americanise the people of Frobisher Bay, the taste of the colonial fruits of Denmark still lingering on his tongue. From the beginning, he used skin colour as a qualifier for Americanism, stating: “One Esquimaux lady, whose husband was as dark as half the negroes of the States, had a very pretty semi-*white* baby, looking true American all over!”¹⁸ Another Inuit was given the nickname Jim Crow. Hall enjoyed renaming the locals based on their resemblances to well-known European figures: one Inuit was called Napoleon for his likeness to Bonaparte. (Similarly, as Ward Churchill has shown, aggressively Christianising and Americanising Indian boarding schools renamed native children, and as Alan Trachtenberg has shown, westward expansionists renamed native lands, often after their wives and daughters.¹⁹) Indeed, gender was as important to Hall’s process of Americanisation as skin colour. His colonial aspirations of Americanising Inuit involved feminising the females in accordance with American middle-class values concerning female bodily comportment and appearance. Queer historian William Benemann argues that in early-to-mid nineteenth century America, white communities strongly enforced bifurcated gender roles and presentation, admonishing those who broke established sartorial patterns.²⁰ Throughout Hall’s published and unpublished diaries of the expedition, there is a discernable fascination with Inuit women: he frequently encouraged their “refinement,” dwelling on their alleged innate

¹⁸ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 127–28.

¹⁹ Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2004), 19; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 125–26.

²⁰ Benemann, *Men in Eden*, 71.

quality of moral goodness and noting approvingly when they brewed tea, coughed politely or served food on plates. However, even as he extolled their virtues, Hall could not escape his own sexualised, colonial politics. An examination of his private journals reveals an exoticisation of Inuit woman, a process that left them as legitimisers of their colonisation.²¹

Chief among Hall's American values was that there should be clear differentiation of the female sex from its male counterpart, a separation to be

²¹ It is difficult to find reliable historical accounts on the lives of Inuit women, especially any written by an Inuk, to compare with Hall's account. Based in oral traditions, Inuit language had little written form until the late nineteenth century. Missionaries with Cree of northern Canada created a writing system of syllabic symbols to capture Cree language; Inuit then adopted this system. It became widespread among eastern Arctic Inuit societies by the early part of the twentieth century, though huge regional varieties still exist with no standardisation. Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* (Vancouver: Faber and Faber, 2000), 39–40. In the appendix of Hall's account, he states that Inuit had no tradition of written language. *Arctic Researches*, 576. Therefore, the accounts of Inuit at Frobisher Bay are to be considered inadequate. Nevertheless, the testimony of Inuit, as written down by Hall, still offers a wealth of information once filtered through a critical reading. In fact, such a reading exposes Hall's entrenched colonial sentiment, offering clues on Inuit through its blatant misrepresentation. Though adequate historical documentation may not exist, there is modern literature on the lives of Inuit women. Dick's excellent, anthropologically sensitive study of Ellesmere Island and the Inughuit (northernmost Inuit groups) reveals that Inuit women in the nineteenth century performed at least half of the labour in communities, carried out much non-gender specific work, and had gender-specific roles, such as drying and sewing skins, that were considered essential to the survival of the family and group. *Muskox Land*, 71–72. In anthropologist Ann McElroy's study of changes in Inuit communities in the 1970s, she chooses the community at Frobisher Bay as one of her ethnographic foci, now the site of an air-force base. She surmises that women were not excluded from leadership and wage-earning opportunities created by a transition from subsistence to wage economy. Usefully, McElroy claims that until these opportunities presented themselves, most women chose to retain traditional roles within the domestic sphere and that these roles went unchanged for a century. "The major components of the female role definition had changed relatively little in the hundred years of contact with explorers, whalers, traders, and missionaries. During the first decade of town-living, a woman who continued to be skilled in working skins, in sewing boots and parkas, and in rearing children was assured of considerable esteem." "Canadian Arctic Modernization and Change in Female Inuit Role Identification," *American Ethnologist* 2 (1975): 663. There is a similarity between Dick and McElroy's assertions: Inuit women did have gender-specific roles but were highly respected for them. This is confirmed by one of the only – and perhaps definitive – contemporary, book-length studies of Inuit women and their challenges in the twenty-first century. Anthropologists Janet Billson and Kyra Mancini assert that since the nineteenth-century whaling period (when records of Inuit–Western interaction began) Inuit men and women had differing roles in society but that these roles were regarded as equally crucial to survival. Using a wide variety of oral and archival historiographical methods to provide historical contextualisation to their ethnographic study, they assert: "Inuit do not describe these role differences in terms of nature or biology but of necessity and workability." *Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 37. Clearly, this jarred significantly with Hall's opinions, which viewed differences in terms of nature (innate, saintly womanhood) and biology (sexual differences). It seems, therefore, that Hall's own disapproval and attempts to specify an American kind of gender dichotomy may have proved disruptive to established, crucial community and work social systems.

achieved in the Western fashion. Hall continually expressed delight at the women when they wore “good” dresses and their hairstyles were done up in “States fashion.” An episode with Kimmiloo, a beautiful girl of 16, was particularly telling of Hall’s attitudes towards women’s appearance.

Kimmiloo has just been Americanized. Captain B—’s good wife had made and sent to her a pretty red dress – a necktie, mittens, belt, etc. Mr. Rogers and I, at a suggestion from me, thought it best to commence the change of nationality with soap and water. The process was slow, that of arriving to the beautiful little girl, whom we at length found, though deeply-imbedded layer after layer in dirt.

Kimmiloo achieved temporary nationalisation only after the androgenising aspects of her “savage” Inuit life, “moss, seal, and reindeer hairs, and many other things – too numerous to call them all by name,” had been literally and metaphorically scrubbed off her body. The process of gendering required that her hair be painfully combed for an hour, that she be made hygienic with soap, and that she be placed in a red dress. Her body, in other words, had to undergo a process of civilising that left it differentiated and sexualised – as Hall and Rogers (or their underlings) soaped and scraped her exposed, post-pubescent body parts, “layer after layer.” For Kimmiloo, rendered a “poor thing... fat and beautiful,” the red dress would have been a less than useful American garment for the Arctic clime.²² Instead, it served as both a marker and an agent of racial uplift, doing the civilising work of empire in a similar manner to beauty products in the twentieth century, “in which the conjuring power of the product to alchemize change is all

²² Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 109–10.

that lies between the temporal ‘before and after’ of women’s bodily transformation.”²³

As other historians of American colonisation have shown, discourses of hygiene were crucial to American colonial projects. In the Philippine tropics in the 1890s, “the political rationalist of American colonialism became manifest in a technical discourse on bodily practice, mundane contact, and the banalities of custom and habit.”²⁴ This was a strategy that made matters of privacy, the washing of bodies and homes, a very open and public process of colonial control. Similarly, Victorian Britain exported soap around the world as a commodity that was invested with near magical qualities that could “persuasively mediate the Victorian poetics of racial hygiene and imperial progress.”²⁵ Soap *defined* hygiene, its absence immediately connoting uncleanness. What is more, the importance of keeping up personal and social hygiene, perpetuated aggressively through consumerism of cleaning goods and toiletries, was increasingly attributed to the domain of feminine domesticity.²⁶ In the Arctic, which played home to increasing American expansionism, Hall’s sentiments can be regarded as being embryonic of these feminised, hygienic-colonial discourses that would go on to have such a central position in future colonial order.

To be civilised in Hall’s imaginary, then, was to partake in performances of hygiene, exemplified by the literal bathing of Kimmiloo above. He noted many times in his journals, snidely, on the lack of general hygiene among Inuit; he once witnessed, “the operation – very rarely performed – of washing a child’s

²³ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 223.

²⁴ Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 2.

²⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 209.

²⁶ Tim Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), 24, 18.

face. This was done by *licking* it all over, much as a dog would do the hand that had just contained a fresh beefsteak.”²⁷ Hall’s disgust was palpable, his imagery de-humanising the mother to the level of animal. His anger was borne out of his belief that it was a woman’s *duty* to clean her people to progress, a mindset he tried to impart to Inuit with an alleged amount of success: “The Inuit women also washed clothes, and soon became so proficient that they could do them as well as Americans.”²⁸ This narration of the merits of technical, hygienic practices, supposedly based on scientific fact and aggressively marketed by a booming industry of cheap soap products, served to instil in Inuit attitudes towards human control over the natural: dirty bodies were to be cleaned, stable domestic spaces were to be built, and, ultimately, savage land was to be settled.

That women were the main actors in these processes was due to their symbolic position as discursive, endangered symbols of civilisation in the Victorian imaginary, made all the more intense by the perceived threat of black citizenship that was dividing the nation back home. Hall firmly believed in white women as the cradle of white civilisation, writing at one point in his narrative: “‘Coming events cast their shadows before them.’ Ladies are events casting *umbra* and *penumbra* along wherever their pathway be, thus bespeaking glory about them constantly.”²⁹ He then made logical connections between white and Inuit women, seeing in the latter the possibility of the advancement of their people. When a woman visited Hall with some salmon in a pretty tea-saucer made of china, an emblem of civilisation itself, he was so delighted that he

²⁷ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 179. Hall’s strong disapproval of Inuit cleanliness is echoed in Burke’s study of colonial Zimbabwe. At the turn of the twentieth century there, “European hygienic practices were defined as the essence of ‘civilization’... For most whites living or traveling in Zimbabwe after 1890, the African world was a world of universal dirt and filth, while their own social world was its opposite, cleansed and pure.” *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 20.

²⁸ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 114.

²⁹ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 158.

declared that, “Truly woman – a good woman – is an angel wherever she is,” his moralising of women and indexing of females along a scale of “good” and “bad” inadvertently exposed.³⁰

At the time, Hall was ill, suffering with boils, and confined to a poorly constructed shelter that could not protect him from wind and rain – “every thing dripping wet” – in a land deemed cold and savage.³¹ The woman’s gendered actions in the narrative turned Hall’s barbaric, disastrous domicile into a space representative of Western domesticity. His *tupic* became, temporarily, a safe abode nurtured by a woman, in the process underscoring the sharp contrast between nature and permanent habitation, a very Western distinction.³² In sum, women’s supposedly innate quality of moral goodness was a powerful force that could cultivate barbaric land into a settled, cultured landscape, a trope widely familiar in fictionalised narratives of the American West in the nineteenth century.³³ This is suggested as such in Hall’s later ruminations on the topic:

Oh, woman! thou, indeed, canst rob pain of its sting, and plant refreshing flowers in its place. Thy mission is a glorious one. Even among the rudest tribes of the earth thy softening hand and kindly heart are found. No land, however distant, however repulsive, limits thy noble deeds... thy good works may be silently done, but they are lasting and immeasurable.³⁴

Of all Inuit Hall encountered, he revered Tookoolito most. Tookoolito and her husband Ebierbing were well known to Anglo-American whalers, who gave them the nicknames Hannah and Joe. The couple previously spent two years in

³⁰ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 408.

³¹ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 408.

³² A *tupic* is a traditional Inuit tent made from animal skin.

³³ Boag argues that women traditionally appeared on nineteenth-century frontier landscapes to tame wild country into civilised settlements. *Re-Dressing America*, 194.

³⁴ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 409.

Great Britain, where they were presented to Queen Victoria and were very well received. Their initial meeting, in the first autumn of Hall's stay, was telling of their future relationship:

I heard a soft, sweet voice say "Good morning, sir." The *tone* in which it was spoken – musical, lively, and varied – instantly told me that a lady of refinement was there, greeting me. I was astonished. Could I be dreaming? Was it a mistake? No! I was wide awake and writing. But, had a thunder-clap sounded on my ear, though it was snowing at the time, I could not have been more surprised than I was... on turning her face, who should it be but a *lady* Esquimaux! Whence, I thought, came this civilization refinement?

Tookoolito was already gendered to the standards of Hall's own society, her clothes "that of civilization, being a dress with heavy flounces," and the variation in her voice differentiating her from other Inuit, the musical quality connoting a level of culture.³⁵ Their close relationship, predicated on her civility, would last over a decade. Tookoolito would follow Hall back to the States after the expedition, where he "exhibited" her and her husband at fundraising events to raise money for his next journey into the Arctic.

Hall was continually in awe of Tookoolito's refined nature, even commenting at one occasion on the polite, hygienic way in which she coughed – to the side and with a hand over her mouth, a performative practice that spoke of civilisation. Once when visiting her tent he found – to his eternal joy – that she was knitting socks for her husband, a very gendered, domestic activity:

"Tookoolito herself was busy *KNITTING socks for her husband!* Yes, to my surprise, she was thus engaged, as if she had been in a civilized land and herself

³⁵ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 157–58.

civilized.”³⁶ He frequently read with her, finding her more eager to learn than her husband. Hall saw himself as a patriarchal, teacher figure despite the fact that Hall seemed the main beneficiary of any educational exchanges between the two.

Hall’s missionary zeal became ignited around Tookoolito. For Christmas in 1860, he presented her with a Bible that had been given to him by the Young Man’s Christian Association, Cincinnati.³⁷ Though Hall wrote, conceitedly, that he never “cast a slur” of Inuit customs, his respect seemed less than genuine. When Tookoolito observed traditional Inuit beliefs, Hall expressed an acidic level of disgust. He severely admonished her for observing Inuit custom of isolating the mortally sick when an old lady fell ill in her igloo and was left to die. Eventually he returned to Tookoolito, somewhat apologetically, stating that she could not be blamed as her people had been ignorant of the Bible until then. Unaware of any irony, in trying to comfort her he wrote: “I told her that some people of America and in England believed a great many ridiculous things, but that did not make them true.” He went on to remind her of the Bible he had given her for Christmas, “*That book is the Word of God. It tells you and me – every body – to visit the sick, the afflicted, the widow, the helpless, the poor,*” his recognition of Inuit customs seemingly dissipated.³⁸

In a bizarre passage, Hall’s attraction to her began to resemble something akin to Christian worship of the Virgin Mary. Commenting on her apparent desire to learn more scriptures, Hall wrote: “God sparing her life and smiling upon her noble purpose, she will yet be worthy to be remembered as ‘MOTHER OF MANY ANGELS.’”³⁹ Just as Mary gave birth to Jesus and Christian

³⁶ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 160.

³⁷ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 79.

³⁸ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 191.

³⁹ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 79.

civilisation, so too could Tookoolito, chosen by Hall, mother a noble, enlightened race. Hall believed there to be urgency to this task; he wrote, “the women are not prolific. I believe they consider children troublesome. The race is fast dying out. Not many years more and the ‘Innuits’ will be extinct.”⁴⁰ There is an implication here that Tookoolito, and the other women, could foster more children if they were to adopt Christian belief, that is, accept the doctrine that love between man and woman is expressed best through the proliferation of offspring. Therefore, though Hall’s colonial instincts may have sprung from rigidly Christian beliefs, they were undoubtedly sexual in nature too, his subtle encouragement of the Word of God being an impetus to bed down and conceive children.

Later, when Tookoolito expressed shock at the rough language of the whalers, Hall again saw in her the saintly image of the weeping Mother of Christ: “One of the Iron daughters of the eternal snows of the North, standing like an angel, pleading the cause of the TRUE GOD, weeping for the sad havoc made.”⁴¹ In admonishing the men, Tookoolito was acting the motherly part and represented, to the delight of Hall, the Victorian ideal that women were the safeguards of morality.

Tookoolito’s alleged longing to understand Christian belief and Hall’s piety were entwined with the colonial discourses of hygiene presented earlier: both ideologies underscored man’s power over nature and mutually bolstered each other. Victorian cleaning rituals, peddled by burgeoning manufacturers of soap in Britain, took their place at the vanguard of imperial, civilising missions in the middle of the nineteenth century. As previously noted, a simple bar of soap

⁴⁰ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 568. Hall uses this incorrect spelling throughout his unpublished and published diaries.

⁴¹ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 78.

promised physical, moral and economic salvation to “unwashed” natives. This kind of commodity culture allowed for smoother enacting of colonising projects, the impersonal commodity becoming an agent of history as opposed to merely a symbol of imperial progress, easing the burden of colonisers who could now rely on growing capitalist structures to be responsible for imparting and enforcing values. Back home too, through the power of advertising that articulated racial differences, “imperial kitsch as a consumer spectacle... could package, market and distribute evolutionary racism on a hitherto unimagined scale.”⁴²

While the links between hygiene-improving commodities and the imperial project have been successfully demonstrated before, inflecting the arguments with Christian missionary sentiment remains understudied territory. Timothy Burke has shown that Christian missionaries in Zimbabwe in the early twentieth century instructed children on the importance of hygiene to God and the association of dirt to profanity, but he stops short of thinking through and articulating the actual similarities between hygienic and Christian dogmas.⁴³ Both dogmas assume that man has control over the natural world (with supernatural countenance and assistance). Both emphasise ritualistic cleansing of an inevitable negativity, that is, dirt in the case of hygiene, and sin in the case of Christianity. To be successful at either set of beliefs is to assume control (“dominion,” in Christian discourse) and to perform purifications habitually, to rid the body and mind of the sully substance and to repeat when necessary. Feminist scholar Ann McClintock argues that “the poetics of cleanliness is a poetics of social discipline,” but this seems applicable to both dogmas.⁴⁴ Teaching the colonised to clean/cleanse ritualistically was to impart a Western

⁴² McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 209.

⁴³ Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 39.

⁴⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 226.

mindset, predicated on Christian belief, of mind over matter (or indeed, muscle over matter), to extricate oneself from the dirtying natural world and walk the path of racial progress.

Therefore, the pious Hall, a man of puritanical faith who saw the world in terms of dark and light, believed that Tookoolito's cleanly habits went hand in hand with her apparent spiritual superiority and concluded that others could be taught that washing the body was a pathway for cleaning the spirit of savagery. He believed that Tookoolito should be educated in the United States (thereby, as with Indian boarding schools, removing her from her community) and returned to advance "noble and good work" among her people because in "dressing her hair, keeping her face and hands clean, and wearing civilisation dresses – others of her sex, in considerable numbers, follow these *fashions* imported by her. This shows to me what one person like Tookoolito could accomplish in the way of the introduction of schools and churches among this people."⁴⁵ Tookoolito apparently fostered progress amongst Inuit by promulgating Western/Christian codified, and significantly gendered, appearances and behaviours. She was an acceptable role model as she had regulated and sanitised her savage body, submitting it to a Western, colonial mindset of a strict gender binary and a ritualisation of hygiene. She was as near to Hall's ideal image of womanhood as could be found in the Arctic and the embodiment of American ideas of progress.

In contrast, Inuit men at Frobisher Bay were cast as somewhat dubious characters, wild and strong but often physically flawed or lacking in intelligence. In his personal journals, Hall had difficulty controlling his anger at them: "They deserve a severe thrashing... I am surprised that Koojesse should treat me so. I

⁴⁵ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 160.

indulged in the hope that he was tintured with enough of Civilization that he would act the manly part with me, but I find it otherwise! He, like the other 2, acts the SAVAGE!”⁴⁶ Where the female body was to be drawn into a discourse of domesticity and propriety, the Inuit male body was rendered as a phenomenon of the natural world and therefore an object worthy of his scientific observation and, clearly, their deference to him. At one point in the narrative, Hall went so far as to demean an Inuk man – “undoubtedly a powerful man, muscular, full-breasted, of great nerve, and firm as iron” – by measuring his naked body for his own gratification.⁴⁷ The image conjured here, of the savage man stripped of his clothes for the curiosity, perhaps titillation, of the white colonialist perfectly portrays the imbalance of power found between coloniser and subject, the body of the former a channel for divine mission and the body of the latter rendered as a set of figures for the pseudo-scientific interest of others.

Hall’s preoccupation with the women begs questions regarding sexual desires. Hall’s biographer, Chauncey Loomis, doubts that he had any sexual liaisons during his almost ten combined years in the Arctic away from his wife, arguing that Hall’s piety was genuine and that he had a typical disposition towards Victorian reticence.⁴⁸ I argue, however, that his writing betrays a level of eroticism, and that his interest in women’s propriety can be read as a thinly veiled attempt to cover his own titillation. Moreover, his obsession with the regulation of the women can be construed as belonging to a sexualised, colonial politics that cultivated the myth of white, male hegemony over the bodies of Others.

⁴⁶ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 117.

⁴⁷ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 276.

⁴⁸ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 88.

A comparison to Hall's private journals, essentially an unedited version of his published account, confirms this. Consider the following description of Suzhi, an overweight Inuk of considerable strength, excised from the journal:

Koodloo and Charley made search, found seal-blubber, brought it in, and passed it to Suzhi, who was in tuktoo – that is, abed. Of course, like all Innuits when in bed, she was entirely nude; but she immediately rose on her elbows, and proceeded to bite off pieces of blubber, chewing them, sucking the oil out, then spitting it into a little cone-like dish.⁴⁹

The actions here, the biting, chewing and sucking, have suggestive connotations, as does the image conjured of the woman messing her face and naked body with fatty blubber. That local women slept nude in bed, per custom, is a fact that he omits from his published account, where he noted that he frequently slept side by side with Inuit, even partaking in the custom of holding his bare feet next to others to keep warm so as to educate himself in all matters Inuit. His neglect to mention the nudity of his sleeping partners attests to his sensitivity towards his audience or at least anxiety over how he would be perceived. Hall had no need to conceal his interest in Inuit male form in his published book, stripping one Inuk man down, as mentioned, to measure his muscles.

Hall finished his description of the blubber-chewing scene by writing: "It was a novel scene, that of Koooulearnng's [Suzhi's] operations in grinding blubber for oil; in particular, the incidental exhibition of what Burns describes as 'Twa drifted heaps, sae fair to see,' exaggerated in size, as in the case with most Innuit women, struck me forcibly."⁵⁰ Hall can only be referring to the size of Suzhi's breasts, which would have been on show as she was leaning back on her

⁴⁹ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 113.

⁵⁰ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 113.

elbows. That they were “novel” to him highlights the supposedly remarkable differences between white and Inuit anatomy. Hall was “struck forcibly” on other occasions: “My what breasts these Esquimaux mothers have! Some of them are like a cow’s bag. If anybody ever reads this beside myself, he or she will laugh when I say: it is a fact, some of the mothers can throw their breasts onto their shoulder!”⁵¹ Though clearly excited by the women’s buxom bodies, Hall’s preoccupation with breasts served to underscore the purported evolutionary differences on which his racial differentiations and colonial aspirations relied. The depiction of women as having “udders,” that is, the association of their bodies with that of animals, would have authenticated his rationalisations of white superiority over primitive, animalistic peoples. This was a reflexive process: in depicting Inuit women as exotic creatures, unusual in their habit of sleeping naked, Hall was easing his own white, colonial guilt by rendering the women as legitimisers of their own colonisation. However much Hall may have regarded the “angelic” Inuit women, tea-saucer and all, as innately superior to men, his personal journals attest to the fact that he could not rid himself of colonial, sexualised attitudes towards the Other.

There is a sharp contrast between the descriptions of Tookoolito, augmented in an aura of saintly motherhood, and Suzhi. Clearly, Suzhi is not Tookoolito. She was already somewhat disqualified in Hall’s mind, as she was overweight, masculine and strong: “Suzhi was so powerful at her oar that she often pulled the boat half round,” Hall wrote.⁵² In her vivid fatness, she lacked the innate qualities of heavenly womanhood Hall found in the other women. But some passages with Tookoolito were as equally suggestive. After complaining

⁵¹ Archives Center, Hall Collection, ACNMAH 0702, Nov 3rd 1860.

⁵² Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 415.

that his feet were “ice-cold” when trying to sleep one night, Tookoolito – presumably sleeping naked – jumped up from her bed to warm Hall up. “Thence she made passage for her hands directly across to my feet, seizing them and drawing them aslant to her side. My modesty, however, was quieted when she exclaimed. ‘Your feet are like ice, and must be warmed InnuIt fashion!’”⁵³ What modesty was it that was quieted exactly?

The management of the sexes on which American colonial ideas of progress rested, was complex. Inuit females were defined by their exaggerated sexual features and then denied of their sexuality; Kimmiloo, the girl of 16, was made female by being placed in a red dress, which helped objectify her even as it shielded her with air of inaccessibility based on her new found propriety. The seeming paradox between Hall’s published and unpublished diaries – that Hall dwelled long and hard on the refinement necessary of Inuit womanhood for progress in his published writing, and yet in his journals contradicted his own beliefs by rendering Inuit woman an object of sexual wonderment – attests to his own conflicted emotions and politics. Hall subsumed the women into a discourse of domesticity and refinement so as to not have to address his own titillation at a racially defined Other. In this sense, Inuit women were simultaneously sexualised and chastised as part of a patriarchal discourse that mapped conflicted emotions on the part of a coloniser onto the bodies of “natives.”

Foucault famously argued that sexuality was a key organising principle for modern societies. In his debunking of the repressive hypothesis, Foucault showed that nineteenth-century Europe did not usher in an age of sexual repression, but rather, around sexuality “never have there existed more centers of

⁵³ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 87.

power; never more attention manifested and verbalized; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more sites where the intensity of pleasures and the persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere.”⁵⁴ While Foucault’s reasoning has proved incredibly influential to scholars of gender and sexuality and beyond, postcolonialism has shown that Foucault neglected colonial space in his discussion, preferring to trace a genealogy of sexuality that reduced the world to a binary between *ars erotica* (the Orient) and *scientia sexualis* (the West).⁵⁵ As shown by this chapter’s depiction of Hall and his desire to manage Inuit people through a systemic separation based on biological, sexualised differences, Foucault’s discourses of sexuality were, in fact, refracted through imperial grounds, and, what is more, they became one of the densest transfer points for power. Similar to discourses of hygiene that turned matters of privacy inside out into public matters of administration, the seemingly private matter of sexuality was fundamental to colonial order, turning “classified colonial subjects into distinct human kinds,” a hierarchical taxonomy that would only go on to naturalise American rule.⁵⁶ For example, the animalisation of Inuit through Hall’s descriptions, the likening of the licking of children’s faces to the actions of a dog, would have evinced for readers at home the alleged superiority of whiteness on which their Arctic aspirations rested. As such, discourses of sexuality, hygiene and Christianity in the colonies came back to shape the colonisers themselves through the proliferation of public narratives in the form of

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 46.

⁵⁵ In *The History of Sexuality*, the opening image of the “imperial prude” is the first and only reference to empire. Postcolonial scholars such as Stoler have argued that for Foucault, “the discursive energy surrounding sexuality remains an internal European matter.” Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 146.

⁵⁶ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 145.

colonial texts, and in this sense they created fluid, didactic relationships between metropole and the imperial frontier.

Hall's colonial ambitions for the Arctic centred on Inuit women who, in his mind, could achieve civilised status through their allegedly innate qualities of virtue, cleanliness and domesticity. By looking right and acting right, Inuit women could lead their people to progress, as exemplified by the purportedly Christian Tookoolito. However, this paradoxical path to supposed enlightenment betrayed the vanity of Hall's middle-class values. What is more, Hall's personal journals reveal his titillation at the exoticised and objectified racially defined Other.

“Smith, à la negro!”

As demonstrated, Hall spent considerable time encouraging among Inuit his image of ideal womankind. Towards the end of his narrative, however, there appears another kind of woman. Smith, one of the whalers from the *George Henry*, appeared blacked-up and cross-dressed during a night of theatricals when the whalers and Inuit came together to share performances in a kind of cross-cultural exchange. The “negress,” rendered as undead and pestilent, was raised in the narrative as a direct comparison to the cleanly, civilised lady of Hall's colonial imagination. She represented American depictions of race and gender projected onto Inuit populations, suggesting that farcical cross-dressing was anything but a benign entity but instead a loaded cultural form that can be considered complicit in the colonial process.

After Hall's plans to visit King William Island were thwarted by the Arctic weather and the destruction of his boat, he spent the winter rather contentedly learning Inuit language and custom. The following summer presented an opportunity for exploration. Hall had been reading about Martin Frobisher, the sixteenth-century English seaman who travelled to Arctic Canada in search of the Northwest Passage. Frobisher discovered and (re)named Frobisher Bay, where he believed he had stumbled on a rich deposit of gold ore. After extensive mining of the area and a return journey with over 1,000 tonnes of the material, it was discovered that the ore was worthless iron pyrite. Inspired by this story, Hall decided to explore Frobisher Bay with a group of Inuit, leaving Tookoolito and her husband Ebierbing behind, and to search for artefacts from the Frobisher expedition.

During this time Hall became increasingly frustrated with his party, whose productive hunting and lack of zeal for historical research aggravated him endlessly. Hall wrote, perhaps at his worst:

Another morning has come & the hunters are still out! They deserve a severe thrashing wh. is the only remedy I can think of for their "Selfish Independence." I know not when I have felt so much & so often like administering physical chastisement. Moral suasion with these creatures is entirely out of the question. Force & severity on the very first infraction of a reasonable rule or law, would soon bring them within the rule of Civilization!⁵⁷

This passage certainly attests to Hall's volatile nature. He was easily offended, and in this case, his frustration at Inuit's understandable lack of passion for Frobisher's relics erupted into white, colonial vitriol. Similar to the descriptions of breasts above, it goes to show that though Inuit could flower "glorious fruits"

⁵⁷ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 116–17.

providing that the women, led by Tookoolito, progressed their people, the biologised behavioural differences of the race could still be drawn upon as both damning facts and justifications for aggressive imperialism. The “thrashing” of a whip is a particularly troubling image considering that unbeknown to Hall, back home the Civil War had been raging for five months, the issue of chattel acquisition of people bringing the country to its knees. Though Hall would go on to show support for the Union, his rendering of Inuit as creatures worthy of physical pain rests especially uneasy in this context. The spectre of the black Other, as will be shown, sits behind this text.

The excursion, nevertheless, ended positively. Hall returned laden with relics from Frobisher’s exploration and mining operation. After sighting the *George Henry*, his mood firmly swung to the better. Following a somewhat conceited reunion with Tookoolito, whose hands allegedly trembled in excitement and face was flooded with tears at the sight of Hall, it was announced that the *George Henry* was to depart in October after an unsuccessful summer of whaling. However, this was not to be.

Seemingly overnight, the *George Henry* became trapped in the ice for another winter. Without preparation, food and fuel became serious problems (and continued Inuit hunting now proved highly sensible alternatives to Hall’s reliquary). Captain Sidney Budington imposed rationing so that only two meals were to be eaten a day. Inuit hunting was indeed crucial; whatever they caught would be bought or bartered for. After a few weeks of fervent gathering, the situation looked less grim: there was enough food to survive and a sizeable amount of driftwood had been collected for fire and warmth. Bodily health may have been secured, but mental health was another matter. During the winter,

Hall's diary entries became strange. He was clearly struggling with cabin fever, hypersensitive and frustrated with everything around him. To his consternation, Budington, an experienced Arctic sailor who understood the dangers of winter depression, encouraged distractions among the whalers that offended Hall's piety.⁵⁸ The men drank, danced and gamed. Hall's popularity evaporated when he successfully complained to the captain about the men's gaming on the Sabbath. The men were not kind to him thereafter.

Other winter activities were theatricals and singing. On 26 November 1861, the biggest night of such festivities, the whalers and Inuit came together on the *George Henry* to share music and performances. The festivities began with the Inuk man nicknamed Jim Crow playing on the Keeloun, a traditional instrument similar to a Western tambourine, with the rest of the Inuit audience seated all around. It would later dissolve into alleged hysteria when Smith blacked-up and terrified the audience. The description of the night by Hall is worth quoting at length:

The keeloun was played in turn by Annawa, Ooksin, Koojesse, and young Smith, *à la negro!*... There came bouncing into the very midst a strapping negress, setting the whole house in a roar of laughter... The tambourine was passed into his hands, and he soon did full justice to the instrument, his or *her* sable fists soon knocking through the whale's liver skin with which it was covered.

When Smith first entered some of the Inuit women were much frightened. Jennie, the *angeko*, was seated near me, and she tried to put as great a distance as possible between herself and the negress, believing the apparition to be an evil spirit. But all shortly became reconciled to the stranger, especially when Smith resumed his place, playing and shouting, Inuit-like, and making so much fun that all our sides ached with laughter. Even the singing women were obliged occasionally to give way and join in the merriment.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 123.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 469–70.

Performance studies scholar Heather Davis-Fisch, in her recent study of Hall's expedition, has claimed that, "it is impossible to reconstruct precisely what the performance meant."⁶⁰ Her verdict is perhaps premature, based as it is on an inadequate consideration of the colonial implications of Smith's blacking-up. The image of this "negress," abruptly raised in the narrative, was a direct and potent comparison to the refined, civilised lady of Hall's colonial imaginary. Where Inuit women had shown promise of Americanisation in wearing proper attire and performing domestic chores, the "strapping," hyper-sexualised "negress" appeared as the opposite, unable to control her bodily movements, dancing so wildly she broke the instrument with her powerful, manly fists. While it was assumed that Inuit women had to be de-androgenised, given gender, the "negress" represented the excess of this process: she occupied a symbolic position of unchecked sensuality in the supremacist imagination.

The juxtaposition between the women gains strength when considering Hall's words earlier, that a "good woman is truly an angel," and the seemingly undead nature of the "negress," whose appearance as an "evil spirit" in the narrative fitted neatly with mid-nineteenth-century attitudes towards minstrel wench characters. Eric Lott has shown that the blacked-up female on stage was known for her "unholy laughs," "fiendish dances" and for hurrying children to "premature graves."⁶¹ Indeed, the image of the undead wench, pestilent and unholy, also jars with the Christian, hygienic dogma presented earlier, the former marking reckless excessiveness and the latter social discipline. I would intervene in the discourse on blackface by arguing that blackface represented a figurative "dirtying-down" of the racial ladder through its literal process of sullyng. To

⁶⁰ Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance*, 117.

⁶¹ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 159.

become black and female, Smith literally had to apply dirt (burnt cork) to his allegedly pure, white skin, the change of colour producing a change in cleanliness. Furthermore, as already discussed, historians have shown that colonising men and women attributed uncleanness to barbarism. However, if dirtiness was also attributable to earthy *sins* and vice-versa, then the appearance of the “negress” in the narrative signals a discursive association, in the white imaginary, of blackness to an unhygienic and therefore decidedly unchristian domain. Specificities aside, Hall’s religiosity, invested in the commodity of soap, also surfaced on the *surfaces* of people, the varied colours and relative “cleanliness” of skin representing the complexity of his racial, religious beliefs.

One only needs to look further at the description of the evening to see more of the sharp differences in the images of womanhood Hall presented in his narrative. “The number of Inuit guests exceeded fifty; many of the ladies were ornamented in the height of fashion among the arctic aristocracy. The brightly-glittering head-bands, and the pendants [sic] of variegated beads which hung from each side of their hair, made the assembly look quite theatre-like.”⁶² Inuit women were imbued with an alleged aristocratic air, their sartorial elegance and attendance of theatre suggestive of a middle-class representation of women, the display among audience members as important as the displays on stage. The racial alternative presented only sentences earlier, the “negress,” helped underscore the imbalance in power between Inuit subject, who could become civilised if their women submitted their bodies to Western standards of comportment, and disqualified African-American citizens, whose women were ungainly and unable to control themselves. As such, the “negress” served as a

⁶² Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 470.

clear warning shot regarding the correct behaviour of women, who were supposed to have control over their bodily functions: “The claim to rationality as against its deficit in the black Other defined the superiority, and universal applicability, of... civilisation.”⁶³

Simultaneously, the “negress” legitimised the concept of white patriarchy to Inuit. In her barbaric, deviant ways, she was depicted as an unacceptable threat to white, male domination over all other subjects. The “negress” was, in many ways, the material representation of this white, male fantasy, and, as such, was a fitting way to transfer these misogynist values to Inuit: “Blackness is the cover under which the male fantasy of exercising complete control over women is played out.”⁶⁴

By providing a suggestive counter-image to the white woman as cradle of civilisation, the “negress” also imposed on Inuit American attitudes towards race: blackface performance was a public demonstration of the authority of the white male’s power to enter and control the black body. It was a means of assuring white supremacy by making the material relations of racial domination seem “amusing, right, and natural.”⁶⁵ Though Inuit women were marked by their regional differences – in that they were firmly of “arctic aristocracy” – they nevertheless were positioned diametrically against blackness, as indeed so many constructs of white American identity were. That this oppositionality was mapped onto Inuit suggests that they were considered suitable colonial subjects for the American project: in witnessing the spectacle of *Smith à la negro*, Inuit were being permitted access to a collective, white racial imaginary. Similar to public, written narratives of voodoo in the nineteenth century, as described in a

⁶³ Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 193.

⁶⁴ Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 312.

⁶⁵ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 3.

recent article by Michelle Gordon in the *American Quarterly*, Inuit's reaction to the gothic "negress" would have evinced for readers at home, "the primitive, oppositional blackness on which construction of their own racial identities relied; these narratives demonstrated the persistent threat of black and female rebellion," and thus, Inuit, without consent, became complicit in the social regulation of the colour line.⁶⁶

The alleged terror of the Inuit women, however, is a racial performance also worthy of consideration. I would argue that it was heavily filtered through layers of colonial sentiment. It was a reflexive narrativisation of Hall's own attitudes superimposed onto a third racial categorisation, which served to reinforce his own sentiments and those of his readers. Though Hall's representation of the terrified women and the "negress" may appear blatantly distorted in analysis, these depictions would have given currency to what Americans then believed to be reality. As Michelle Gordon explains, "A public transcript sanctions a prevailing order by naturalizing the imbalance of power, and by obscuring or coding the mechanics of domination."⁶⁷ Just as the fear at the "negress" would have confirmed black otherness and inferiority, the depiction of Inuit would have also have served to naturalise for readers the imbalance of social power between white men and Inuit "children" that this colonial text suggests throughout. As described by polar historian Lisa Bloom in her analysis of American ideologies of polar expeditions, colonialist texts have tended to erase or rescript interaction with Inuit so that native voices confirmed there was "only one civilization, one path of progress."⁶⁸ The exoticised readings of Inuit's terror, therefore, conveniently mirrored the American racial hysteria

⁶⁶ Gordon, "Midnight Scenes and Orgies," 769.

⁶⁷ Gordon, "Midnight Scenes and Orgies," 768.

⁶⁸ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 5.

back home; the suggestive mingling of white man, black woman, performing Inuit-like dancing proved so ridiculous that this violation of colour lines could only be met with fear then laughter. Interestingly, in Robert Peary's expeditions to the Arctic beginning three decades later, there was no recorded fear at the sight of his African-American companion, Matthew Henson, who also achieved the North Pole but was written out of the narrative. At the end of his life, Henson was working as a parking attendant in Brooklyn for minimal pay while Peary had been established as a national hero.⁶⁹

Further still, the appearance of the "negress" in the text can be read as a distorted first contact, a production of ill will, between Inuit, rendered as scared children, and black culture, depicted as grotesque, and one facilitated by the American colonial imaginary that sought to foreclose any future possibility of alliance across racial subordinates. The "negress" was, after all, a representation of black culture presented to an audience with perhaps limited knowledge of black culture and little imagery with which to compare it.⁷⁰ In this sense, this popular narrative not only naturalised black-white relations through its comic depiction of the "negress" and Inuit-white relations through the infantilisation of Inuit men and women, it also produced relations between these two racially defined Others in the American public imaginary. Though this presumptive first contact was a conjured one, it nevertheless would have authenticated for readers

⁶⁹ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 97.

⁷⁰ I can find no evidence of African-American whalers on board the *George Henry* or in the proximity of Frobisher Bay. This seems curious, considering that British and American navies had a tradition of hiring black men as sailors. See, for example: Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (London: Penguin Books, 2012); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003). This absence of evidence (which by no means constitutes definitive evidence of absence) may suggest that black men were somehow seen by employers as unsuitable to cold climates. Feminist scholar Clare has argued that the sensation of feeling cold is "infused with the politics of race," that there exists a claim that "race determines one's suitability to a particular climate." "Feeling Cold," 178. The possible lack of African-Americans on this expedition and others, therefore, may point to racist readings of the exigencies of polar climate in Hall's era.

what its author considered reality: that black-Inuit relations were a preposterous, damned notion, a meeting of colours that could only end in surrealist scenes, as indeed this “negress” passage does. This “first contact” would have underscored that though white society could struggle to relate to “uncivilised” indigenous peoples, racially defined Others at the black extremities would have even greater difficulty due to their alleged primitiveness.

Even in a place ostensibly devoid of black people as the white Arctic, the sailors nevertheless performed a commodified version of black culture as an example of their own practices from home. While the “negress” showed the necessity of racial categories to white identity, she also represented wider national and cultural identity: in this cross-cultural exchange, blackface performance was seen as the most fitting representation of the American nation despite the poor socio-economic standing of the very people it ridiculed. It is not surprising that when blacked-up, Smith performed very patriotic songs on the keeloun, such as “Yankee Doodle,” and “Hail Columbia.”⁷¹ Scholars have long pointed to blackface as belonging to a mixed economy of pleasure and power. Like minstrel performers of the same era, Smith and the men could barely keep repressed the interest they had in black cultural practices and felt compelled to share them with the Inuit audience. The “negress” betrayed an appreciation of, or at least fascination with, darker bodies and culture at a time when the American nation had been laying its foundations on the back of black labour and Indian land. There were, as Lott puts it, “contradictory impulses at work.”⁷²

⁷¹ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 468–70.

⁷² Lott, *Love & Theft*, 4.

Scholars have pointed to the proximity of black bodies to white society as necessitating a coping mechanism, in that blackface practices emerged not from a separation of races, but from intimate contact between them on a daily basis. Though American society in the nineteenth century was rigidly delineated in material terms between white and blacks, it developed culturally from the transgressions of those very same boundaries.⁷³ Lott argues that minstrelsy was born out of more egalitarian places of mixing between labouring whites and free blacks, such as working-class areas in northeastern cities. However, it is crucial to consider whether this theorisation of blackface applies outside of the metropole or, indeed, any area with so few black people as the Arctic.

In the literature on histories of racial performance, there has been scant attention paid to instances of blackface in colonial spaces. As shown in my Introduction, blackface in Britain acted as an exaggerated, catch-all identity for those at the bottom of a racially defined hierarchy. It literally put a visual and aural authenticator of imperial authority, the blacked-up buffoon, on centre stage. But blackface also spoke to the insecure identities of those at home: with a growing awareness of non-European cultures throughout an increasingly open world, and the pressures brought on by bringing master-colonial spheres into ever-closer contact, British uniqueness and authority needed to be perpetually reassured through performative acts. Blackface contributed to this reaffirmation of supremacy. Though speaking to the relation between imperialism and blackface, these scholars do not consider blackface performance in actual colonial spaces, nor how this performance tradition engaged the social systems found there. I would suggest, therefore, that the study of blackface abroad

⁷³ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 25.

diversifies the literature in three ways: first it offers insights into how this cultural formation can speak to social realities found outside the metropole; secondly it focuses on a form of popular entertainment that had wide appeal across the social spectrum, thereby providing glimpses of working-class experience in the colonies, another generally neglected aspect of postcolonial enquiry. Finally, it represents the documentation of amateur blackface, a rarely studied offshoot of this performance tradition.

In the colonies, whiteness was a continually insecure identity that required myriad performances of racial authority. As Ann Stoler amply relates, “Racisms have riveted on ambiguous identities – racial, sexual, and otherwise – on anxieties produced precisely because such crafted differences were not clear at all.”⁷⁴ The proximity of racially defined Others on the imperial frontier, the daily mingling of coloured and white bodies in both domestic and work space, created insecurities about racially defined identity, especially among white labourer populations, a similar set of circumstances to the situation that necessitated blackface in Britain as outlined above. Certainly, colonial blackface constituted one way in which whites could continually and narcissistically reaffirm their identity by rounding on blackness. As shown in the Hall example, there was a presumed absence of black bodies in the Arctic (and a likely proliferation of non-white bodies there, as mercantile and expeditionary cultures brought more lands, peoples, and their sailors together in mixed company). And yet, paradoxically, blackface was still the primary method of demonstrating and affirming American whiteness during the cross-cultural exchange with Inuit. As argued below, at a time when the men’s bodies were slowly degrading in health

⁷⁴ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 145.

due to the extreme climate of the Arctic, blackface constituted an attempt to salvage sentiments of white superiority over Others and the environment.

White identity formation aside, I would argue that outside of American urban spaces, the black-white binary to which blackface is often tethered is weakened in its relevance. Blackface instead became a spectacle loaded with meaning for an audience composed of racially defined Others, serving to accept and stymie these identities within the colonial imaginary simultaneously. Acceptance because, in creating a public spectacle out of Jim Crow, whites such as Smith positioned blackness as the opposite of whiteness and granted Inuit access to this identity formation. In other words, if Inuit were to adopt a system of ridicule of black practices, they too could become, figuratively, “white.” This, therefore, was a mechanism of colonial assimilation enacted through cross-dressing and blacking-up. It speaks to ways in which seemingly benign recreational activities do, in fact, expose the racialised ideologies of explorers, and that these “imperialist values were used, *inter alia*, in helping to dilute the problems generated by inequalities between social classes and genders, and to promote a more stable and united sense of national integration and purpose.”⁷⁵

However, blackface also served to repel the social advancement of non-black racialised Others in colonial spaces. In witnessing the spectacle of pain through the theatrical entering and domination of black bodies, and the “perpetual sorrow of life under slavery,” Inuit were being made to acknowledge the power of the single, male, white figure above all others.⁷⁶ I would argue that black bodies, therefore, were used in racial policing in the colonies. Viewed this way, distorted representations of African-American culture gained transnational

⁷⁵ Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 189.

⁷⁶ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 188.

significance, even within imperial peripheries, where they were used as a method to facilitate interaction between white and Other. The black figure not only helped define oppositional white identity, but its imagery also became a channel for reforming Other identity, though this identity formation was based on white values and prejudices and was without black voice.

The case of Smith *à la negro* is also a rich example of working-class entertainment in the colonies. Postcolonial enquiry has tended to blur coloniser experience by assuming that the actions of all white men in the colonies expressed a unified, European mentality of a conquering elite.⁷⁷ The frequently used category of “coloniser” has been historically inadequate, failing in scope to represent myriad experiences found among Europeans at imperial peripheries. Even within coloniser communities, middle-class men and women would differentiate themselves from one another through social distinctions and performances while ever reinforcing the dichotomy between themselves and racially defined subjects. In their economic pursuit of whales, the men aboard the *George Henry* became agents of colonial aggression, and their cultural practices, the blackface performance described by the middle-class Hall, can be viewed as a dense transfer point for American values and power to local populations (one arguably just as potent as policy impositions from a governing elite) in an egalitarian place of mixing between different racially defined groups. As argued, it spoke to the political and social concerns of the genesis of Arctic colonialism, streamlining potential racial tensions by demonstrating, from the get-go, the authority of white, masculine power through the ridicule of blackness. Even when considering the performance at face value, it caused, if not terror, then

⁷⁷ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 23.

certainly discomfort among Inuit. This most basic outcome is enough to consider that the recreational activities of white labourers had potentially harmful affects on American colonial subjects.

Furthermore, fears of white impoverishment and suffering in the Arctic were fresh on the mind after the *George Henry* became iced in for another winter. The whalers became violent and apathetic during the dark months; theft became common; and there was a syphilis outbreak.⁷⁸ These tensions would have been somewhat alleviated among the whalers by rounding on another figure, one wholly more destitute: Jim Crow. Smith *à la negro* was a performance of ridiculing the black body at a time when the men's bodies and minds were under threat themselves, a form of entertainment that related to but also eased life on the extreme frontier by reaffirming their own white, but slowly degrading, superiority, a process similar to Kane's "negro songs" discussed in the previous chapter. It is likely that Smith's cross-dressing spoke to homoerotic tensions among the crew too, who felt the pressures of living in a society with few white women and severe racial prejudices against sexual contact with Inuit.⁷⁹ As such, this instance of blackface, through its psychosocial benefits, was complicit in the

⁷⁸ Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, 124. Though Hall gives no further information on this outbreak, it is likely that the *George Henry* whalers were sexually active with one another and/or with local Inuit, miscegenation between these two peoples being common in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains*, 105.

⁷⁹ Homoerotic tension was an established part of whaler society. The key text on American whaling, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, suggests as much. Rictor Norton, who defines himself as a "gay historian," exposes the homoerotic elements in the friendship between protagonist Ishmael and Queequeg, who are "quite unambiguously married, and even symbolically conceive and give birth to a child" in the text. Rictor Norton, "Herman Melville," accessed 15 September 2014, <http://rictornorton.co.uk/melville.htm>. Peter Coviello similarly argues for the figurative marriage of Ishmael and Queequeg before highlighting the immense phallic symbolism present in the story once Ishmael is at sea, especially in the well-known sperm-squeezing scene: "Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it." Melville, *Moby Dick*, 485. He argues that this sexually loaded passage speaks to the "deranging joys of male shipmate intimacy." *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: New York University Press, 2003), 135. The existence of these passages in *Moby Dick*, therefore, suggests recognition of the intense same-sex relationships and homoeroticism found in homosocial whaling societies in the nineteenth century.

imposition and maintenance of growing American imperial power in the Arctic, based as it was on the acquisition of resources such as whale through cheap labour. It went to show how transient/poor men, rarely considered imperial actors, could help make successful the course of colonialism through their allegedly mundane actions.

Blackface at the poles underscores the fluid, evolving and transnational nature of this performance tradition. Usually considered an American national phenomenon that spoke to black-white racial tensions, it is crucial to consider how blackface formations were reimagined and recontextualised outside home borders and how these manifestations complicated hegemonic forms.

In breaking new boundaries, colonial blackface destabilises the hegemony of its urban counterpart, which had become an increasingly ubiquitous form of popular entertainment with a common format established by a few professional, widely popular minstrel groups that “were apparently able to take home astronomical weekly paychecks.”⁸⁰ At the most basic level, amateur blackface diversifies the canon of this performance tradition simply through its existence. Popular troupes appropriated cultural forms from Europe and then burlesqued them to create programmes relatively uniform in their style and sequencing, but amateur blackface, and its more intimate sites of enactment, reflected local idiosyncrasies and was relatively uninfluenced from the homogenising power of mass entertainment. This instance of blackface suggests that there were myriad performances occurring across time and space: if amateur blackface occurred near the North Pole, it is tantalising to consider what other sites of enactment existed and how they related to local social concerns.

⁸⁰ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 171.

Unfortunately, there is a deficiency of literature on amateur blackface, a gap in the discourse that requires further research.

Music historian William Mahar has shown that minstrelsy in the 1840s had become a commercial venture that sought to cash in by adapting its material to suit the differing and changing tastes of its mass-market, cross-class audiences. By the turmoil of the late 1850s, for instance, minstrel companies recognised the commercial power of nostalgia, packaging up and performing older minstrel routines that would appeal to audiences alive two decades earlier.⁸¹ However, colonial blackface, a far more amateur form, decouples minstrelsy's ties to commerce, exposing a rawer, uninhibited form of entertainment not influenced by the wallets of its audiences.

For example, while professional groups in America did ridicule women as an expression of the misogyny of all-male performance groups, they curtailed this burlesquing of women as time wore on due to fiscal concerns: "However much the minstrels may have ridiculed women, they certainly wanted mothers and their children in the audience." Many groups advertised the respectability of their programmes and their suitability for family audiences, presenting "only those images of women they felt would be successful in popular entertainment."⁸² Womanhood became a commodity to play with on stage to secure wider audience participation and profit. However, it is clear from Smith's blackface episode that performers did not alter representations of powerful cultural assemblages, such as womanhood, for fiscal gain such as they did at home, though Hall's mind was surely still lingering on the potential financial fruits of Inuit. Instead, they poorly represented womanhood solely as a means to

⁸¹ Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 27, 36.

⁸² Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 325–26.

accumulate the currency of white, masculine capital. Smith and, by extension, Hall's narrative, used the black female body only to market white, patriarchal domination, the promotion of some social goods (whiteness, maleness) by making other social goods (blackness, womanhood) seem weaker, ineffectual, of less value. This, therefore, more readily exposes the core of racist, misogynist theatricality than the hegemonic forms that Mahar examines. It represented performers' intense preoccupation with social concerns in the moment, a kind of social consciousness outside the paradigm of profit. It highlights the effectiveness of theatrical performance in transferring values. More in-depth analysis of amateur blackface – much needed – might further expose its racial, sexual and class connotations and its capacity to carry them over to the audience by removing commercial gain from the picture.

Furthermore, once decoupled from commercial interests, amateur blackface was freer to experiment in form. One remarkable aspect of the evening on board the *George Henry* was the unlikely meeting of blackface and Inuit performance traditions. During the playing of the *keeloun*, when Inuit were dancing "wild figures," the "negress" bounded into the merriment and ended up playing American songs on the instrument, using two iron spoons for drumsticks.⁸³ This unlikely scenario, of a man cross-dressed and blacked-up sharing centre stage with Inuit, produced a dialogue between cultural practices that appropriated and redeployed aspects from one another to the amusement of the racially mixed audience. This hybrid performance can be regarded as what Matthew Rebhorn calls frontier performativity.⁸⁴ That is, it was a figurative performance of the frontier – the meeting of diverse cultures represented by the

⁸³ Hall, *Arctic Researches*, 469.

⁸⁴ Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 19.

appearance, then reluctant acceptance, of the “negress” – and a frontier performance in that it was the first, and very likely only, of its kind, created within that liminal time and space.

Commercial blackface minstrelsy troupes incorporated and burlesqued performance traditions from across the Atlantic, Americanising them through grotesque racial mockery to make them more acceptable to home audiences.⁸⁵ For example, minstrels lampooned the pretensions of upper-class Americans by appropriating and distorting Italian operas, to the delight of middle-class paying audiences who viewed the sudden acquisition of wealth and its attendant tastes (opera) as unappealing. Similarly, men enacted blackface in the colonies as a means to appropriate new forms and facilitate direct inter-cultural engagement. More specifically, the men used the “negress” as a vessel to accommodate new, culturally significant practices. Note that a white man only danced Inuit-like when behind the safety of burnt cork, suggesting that assimilation of new dance forms had to be passed through grotesquely caricatured black bodies. In other words, colonial men, sure of their racial superiority, could only enjoy Inuit dancing once it had been thoroughly Americanised through use of blackface, rendering it as comically dumbed down and safe to practice without losing status.

In sum, blackface abroad was a malleable phenomenon that retained its ability to speak to social patterns when removed from its traditional sites of enactment. It could express and consolidate multiple discourses of racial feeling and help facilitate imperial, racial policing. In the Hall case, blackface was also used to underscore American values concerning female’s bodies: the “negress” was a demonstration of unchecked sensuality deemed unacceptable by

⁸⁵ Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 2–3.

civilisation's standards. As such, blackface and amateur theatrics, recurring tropes during polar exploration, became crucial sites for imposing on others Western assumptions of gender and race.

Conclusion

I have argued that images of womanhood and female bodily comportment were intimately connected to American ideas of progress. For Inuit at Frobisher Bay to become colonial subjects in America's apparently inevitable and God-given ascension to supremacy, it was necessary for them to adopt a management of the sexes. The woman's body had to be submitted to gendered standards, beginning with removal of androgynous aspects of indigenous life such as the foliage of Arctic wilderness found on Kimmiloo's body and in her hair. Then she was made responsible for performances of domesticity, civilising the land through domestic rituals such as knitting and tea-brewing. Hall's religiosity influenced the way in which he attempted to civilise Inuit, his vision of progress being predicated on rituals of hygiene that were mutually compatible with Christian rituals of cleansing the soul of sin.

Likewise, Hall and the whalers used a blackface representation of a hyperbolic black womanhood to underscore white, male supremacy over the racially and sexually defined Other. The "negress" was the antithesis of the refined lady of Hall's colonial imaginary, she represented a deviant kind of womanhood, one that acted without social discipline but with excessive sexual abandon. Furthermore, in her undead-like appearance, she was suggestive of an unholy, dirt-ridden apparition that jarred with the rituals of purification Hall had

been attempting to pass on to the allegedly animalistic Inuit. Her deviant womanhood, as such, was a display to Inuit of unacceptable American citizenship, and the alleged fear of Inuit at this blackface representation suggests a mapping of American fears and desires onto a third racial category as a method of control over both. Viewed this way, blackface abroad can be seen as an instrument of colonial strategy as well a method of self-aggrandising white identity back home. I also suggest that examining manifestations of amateur blackface at the poles diversifies the literature on the history of this performance tradition of blackface, which is significantly American-centric despite its global iterations.

Taking a critical stance to Arctic theatrics in the 1860s opens up questions as to how cultural constructs are complicit in the proliferation and maintenance of imperial might. Hall's blackface scene undoubtedly affected relations with Inuit, allegedly horrifying the audience. But what is more, it sanctioned colonial sentiment back home through its depiction of racially defined Others as animalistic, infantile or undead. It provided a new language of colonial politics that readers could use to justify their conceptions of white supremacy in the Arctic, proving to the scholar Michael Pickering that there was "a richer understanding of the dialectical complexities of symbolic exchange between colonial periphery and the imperial centre."⁸⁶ Polar exploration was not only an empire-building activity through the transgression of physical space, but a cyclical process of value formation, transference and reaffirmation, and studying its resultant cultural formations – cross-dressing and blackface – offers insight into this newly uncovered paradigm.

⁸⁶ Pickering, "John Bull in blackface," 189.

Chapter 3

Breaking the Ice: The hegemony of climate, physical culture and the performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave* during the *Discovery* Expedition

A month before *A Ticket-of-Leave* was due to debut at the Royal Terror Theatre, a southern continuation of the Royal Arctic Theatre that playfully alluded to Mount Terror in the distance, director and playwright Lieutenant Michael Barne handed out the parts to his theatrical company in the storage hut built on shore, not far from the iced-in *Discovery*. In the midst of the long, dreaded winter, Barne and his actors persevered with their rehearsals in spite of the raging weather: “We all got thoroughly chilled in the hut and on the way back I expect every one got frost bitten in consequence. We had the wind up against us. I got my nose & cheeks frost bitten.”¹ Nearly a month later, Barne was nervously putting the finishing touches on his stage. After tinkering away in the hut, he wrote, “Worked at the scenery all day. It is practically ready now. After dinner we had a dress rehearsal, wigs & coats but no paint, fake moustaches or trousers... I think it will go off all right.”² It did, in fact, go off better than all right: it was a rip-roaring success, with the cross-dressing particularly enjoyed amid whoops and whistles. In the most unlikely space as can be, Antarctica, men considered the definition of heroic dressed as women to entertain one another despite the distressingly low temperatures and constant incursion of the climate onto the body.

¹ Michael Barne diary, 28 May 1902, MS. 1518, Scott Polar Research Institute.

² Barne diary, 21 June 1902.

The climate of Antarctica regulated the microphysics of daily life for the crew of the British *Discovery* Expedition, 1901–04, yet temperature’s relation to nearly every social process has, in fact, received little analysis in the humanities. In a recent path-breaking article on the phenomenology of feeling cold, feminist scholar Stephanie Clare confirms that “we have yet to understand how earthly, temperate existence affects understandings of the self and experiences of subjectivity and objectification.”³ This chapter begins to redress this vast oversight in scholarship. Drawing on Marsha Ackermann’s social history of air-conditioning as a rare example of how attention to climate can shape a historiography, it aims to connect (freezing) temperatures to wider social processes that produced standards for how the body was to “feel and function.”⁴

Where Ann Stoler has suggested that colonial governance was consolidated in all matters of the intimate, from cooking to nursery to hygiene, I use her ethnographic focus on the “minor,” the intimate, to look at how climatic environment can regulate individuated and aggregated bodies.⁵ I begin by charting the crew’s obsession with the climate, which drastically reduced the explorers’ sense of spatiality. Individuated bodies became frustrated, immobilised subjects in a dominating, restricting environment. The temperature also affected their sense of subjectivity: a regime of anxiety, brought around by the incessant encroachment of frostbite and polar depression, created a sense of threat to the corporeal and mental self. This compelled the men towards performative actions, namely bodybuilding and cross-dressing in *A Ticket-of-Leave*, to reclaim a sense of agency over their compromised corporeal selves.

³ Clare, “Feeling Cold,” 170.

⁴ Ackermann, *Cool Comfort*, 4.

⁵ Ann Stoler, ed., *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacies in North American History* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 7–13.

When individuated bodies aggregated, however, they became quickly inflected with queer desire. Constant anxiety over health, the kind first fostered during Parry's initial forays into the Arctic, lurked in the Southern Polar darkness too. The crew of the *Discovery* attempted to sublimate their negative feelings through manly, physical work – that is, by performing able-bodiedness. In the depths of darkness, however, the officers and sailors began to regard one another as objects of desire as they frequently exercised and were inspected by medical officers in an effort to stay afloat of the degradation of the white, colonial body.

An eroticised physical culture flourished on board – a fact readily available in the journal entries of the crew – similar to the cult of bodybuilder Eugen Sandow, the YMCA in America, and other institutions that stressed salvation through body work. I argue the low temperatures were complicit in this glamorisation of male form. In other words, climate necessitated a healthy-yet-queer standard for the body. Elsewhere, out on sledging excursions, the men came together for warmth in three-man sleeping bags, lying side by side in an attempt to heat one another by touching their gendered, heroic bodies. This warming function, shared between multiple men as opposed to a dyad, defied class boundaries, representing a disruption to normative affection at the very least. As such, where the experience of coldness was seen as something that could strengthen the constitution of the white, masculine body, especially at a time when widespread notions of British masculinity were under threat, I argue it had the opposite effect. It Othered the male body, rendering it as something that could be objectified, eroticised or shared for warmth. Throughout my discussion on climate, I constantly stress that, as one history of queer Arkansas adequately

puts it: “The natural landscape is constantly writing itself on the landscape of the body.”⁶

The performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, which saw members of the theatrical company dangerously underdressed on stage in women’s clothing, was a protest against the regime of anxiety produced by the freezing temperatures and subsequent afflictions. Breaking the repetitive hegemony of frostbite and immobility through dogged determination at nightly rehearsals, the camp performance generated an economy of laughter, where repressed anxieties could be temporarily liberated. Furthermore, the play’s themes of imprisonment, release and reacceptance into society, an analogy between polar and prison spaces, were a cathartic working-through of the crew’s fears regarding their return.

It is little surprise that *A Ticket-of-Leave* spoke to the men’s suppressed homoeroticism, which can be read as a product of the self-imposed gender exclusivity of the expedition. The addition of a young female character to the plot, Mary Ann, was an attempt to address the spontaneous flowering of same-sex desire out of the literal and figurate darkness surrounding their sexuality. That “Mary Ann” was a contemporary pseudonym for an effeminate man suggests the crew understood this predicament.⁷ However, while Mary Ann may have indicated a cheeky knowledge of the queer implications of her addition to the play, she may also have served to deter some incidents of same-sex activity. If men were to be discovered bunking up in the dark, they too might have been labelled a “Mary Ann.”

⁶ Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*, 11.

⁷ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, 124.

I argue in broad terms that these recreational pursuits – physicality and cross-dressing – paradoxically interrogated the very gendered ideologies and homoeroticised discourses upon which this costly expedition was founded. Frequent cross-dressing, a performance tradition often labelled subversive, was functionally crucial to the success of the *Discovery* Expedition: the sailors frocked-up to forward their imperial endeavour by safely dispersing their fears and homoerotic feelings, thereby reducing any threat of disruption through the onset of aggression and/or depression. Therefore, I underscore the important palliative effects of such activities, which have been historically relegated to the periphery of polar historiography. Finally, I suggest that the category of heroism is a product of national discourse and immense cultural work, and that an examination of the lesser-known activities of polar explorers interrogates this seemingly monolithic persona and its on-going production. I begin this chapter with an introduction to the *Discovery* Expedition, its causes and its crew through an examination of the first theatrical endeavour on board: the Crossing the Line ceremony enacted at the equator.

Crossing the Line

Scott's later and ill-fated attempt to Antarctica in 1910–13 greatly overshadows his previous *Discovery* Expedition. The first real foray into Antarctica proper, *Discovery* laid the foundations for what is known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration, and introduced some of the major British figures to the south polar regions, most notably Scott, Ernest Shackleton and

Edward Wilson.⁸ It was a successful nationalistic endeavour that saw Scott lavished with medals and his published account become a phenomenal success. It sold out almost immediately, with 4,500 copies gone in its first two print runs.

The expedition's scientific outcomes have slowly won recognition after remaining contested for decades, but the success of the naval brotherhood, which supposedly revelled in its boyish sense of camaraderie and adventure, has never been disputed.⁹ However, the *Discovery*'s crew was fractured along different lines. A historiographical focus on the competition between scientific and naval contingents on board, as elitist as this discussion has been, has totally occluded the lower decks as a class. The first instance of cross-dressing, the Crossing the Line ceremony at the equator performed by the sailors, unified the differing, upper-class factions on board (navy officers and civilian scientists) by inadvertently formalising an attitude of bodily respect among the crew.

British interest in Antarctica began in 1839 when James Clark Ross, locator of the North Magnetic Pole, led an expedition to find its southern equivalent but instead came upon and named the Ross Sea, Victoria Land and the Great Ice Barrier. With subsequent focus given to locating John Franklin's missing expedition and reaching the North Pole, interest in Antarctica withered. However, at the close of the nineteenth century, colonialists had "discovered" the "depths of darkest Africa," leaving most of the world now mapped. Back up North, American interest in the Arctic was culminating in the ever-closer encroachment on the pole. With colonial powers scrambling to find more discursive space in which to enact the imperial fantasy, British attention turned to

⁸ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, xi.

⁹ The *Discovery* Expedition's published scientific discoveries were criticised for their lack of quality and depth. Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, 70. However, Scott did bring back evidence of the existence of an Antarctic Continent, challenging the assumption it was a collection of islands. The expedition also achieved a new "farthest south" record of 82° 17' S, 480 miles from the pole.

the Great White South, which quickly became the last frontier in the Western imaginary. The white of the continent, both on maps and in the literal sense, was an open invitation for “colouring in” by those colonial forces that were ostensibly exploring the world in the name of human progress.¹⁰ German and Swedish governments funded expeditions to Antarctica in 1901; ostensibly magnetic observation expeditions, these nationalist endeavours generated ever greater pressure on the old guard of Britain to renew their polar hegemony with due haste. Britain’s hegemony at the poles had been left unguarded since the 1870s when George Nares’ disastrous expedition failed to reach the North Pole but succeeded in its farcical cross-dressing. The time to act was now.

Clements Markham, whose account of the farcical Arctic winter of 1850–51 has already been discussed in Chapter 1, was the driving force behind the *Discovery* Expedition. Markham, along with a growing portion of the British public, was keen for a sensationalist heroic achievement at the South Pole, yet paradoxically it was women that led to the realisation of these manly polar aspirations. Markham, an avid polar explorer and expert author, was made president of the Royal Geographical Society in 1893, having served as the secretary of the Royal Geographical Society from 1863 to 1888. The Society was ostensibly an organisation for the geographic “discovery” of the planet, yet moreover was an official arm of British colonialism and civilising mission.

In 1892, a bitter dispute raged within the Royal Geographical Society over the admission of 22 women, who had requested, lobbied for and been granted full membership. Isabella Bird Bishop, a writer and traveller, had worked for years to reform the society. She was a founder member of the Royal

¹⁰ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 2.

Geographical Scottish Society, which welcomed women members since its inception in 1884. She gave papers at the Scottish society's branch in London, rejecting invitations to speak in front of the Royal Geographical Society until she be made a fellow, much to its irritation and humiliation.¹¹

However, a group of reactionary figures within the society strongly opposed the final acceptance of women such as Bishop and, indeed, any further reform. Led by young Tory MP George Curzon, they argued that the "dilution" of the society with the other sex was representative of its increasingly passive role: with much of the planet mapped, many felt that the Society should shift its focus to educational endeavours. Not Curzon, however, who promoted the traditional model of exploration and derided "*in toto* the general capability of women to contribute to scientific geographical knowledge... the genus of professional female globe-trotters with which America has lately familiarised us is one of the horrors of the latter end of the 19th century."¹² The disputing parties, increasingly hostile towards one another, began to tear the society apart, while reporting by newspapers further damaged its reputation as outsiders witnessed venomous in-fighting. The *Daily Telegraph* derided Curzon as having become too "Mohameddan" on women's rights after a stint of travel in "the East."¹³ *Punch* and *Judy* provided constant feminist ridicule aimed at the Royal Geographical Society. Eventually, in 1893, the leadership unceremoniously dismissed a referendum that overwhelmingly favoured the continued admission of women in an effort to silence the issue and move on. The 22 women who had

¹¹ Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, "The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892-1914: the Controversy and the Outcome," *The Geographical Journal* 162 (1996): 296-97.

¹² G. N. Curzon to the Editor, *The Times*, 31 May, 1893, 11, cited in Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, 54.

¹³ *Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 1893, cited in Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, 55.

successfully fought for admission remained in the fellowship, but no more would join for another 20 years. The effects of the rift were profound and the society's reputation lay in tatters: Grant Duff resigned his presidency; Douglas Freshfield, honorary secretary and a driving force behind the admission of women, left his post.¹⁴

After so much of the leadership resigned in the wake of the scandal, causing further public and private upset, the council finally found a willing, suitable and safe candidate: Markham, who had kept his opinions on the admission of women private, or what he dubbed the "female row."¹⁵ Accepting the position in 1893, his presidency was a clear conservative if not reactionary stance. In an effort to repair the broken standing of the society among its members, he formalised his push for a British expedition to Antarctica, believing that reigniting enthusiasm for geographic discovery and patriotism could reunite the institution. Markham later explained in a letter to Curzon, in 1911, a few days after Scott's second departure:

I believed, rightly or wrongly, that the only way to restore the Society's credit was to undertake some great enterprise in the cause of geography. I chose the Antarctic regions. It was a risk... All depended on the leader of the expedition. Scott was selected with great care... we owe him an immense debt of gratitude. It restored our credit to us, lost by the mismanagement of the female trouble.

Inarguably, the rejection of womankind set in motion the chain of events that would lead Scott to the pole.¹⁶ Considering the outcomes of the highly homosocial nature of the expedition – bodybuilding and Mary Ann – this causational relationship seems paradoxical. The Royal Geographical Society

¹⁴ Bell and McEwan, "The Admission of Women Fellows," 297.

¹⁵ Bell and McEwan, "The Admission of Women Fellows," 297.

¹⁶ Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, 57–58.

went to great lengths to oppose the admission of women, citing its traditional role in promoting manly exploration, and then opted for Scott and his men to repair their damaged reputation. These men, however, donned frocks and wigs, acted out love scenes on stage, and gazed upon one another as they built muscle, suggesting that though their masculine enterprise was a response to the increasingly unjustifiable exclusion of women, they felt compelled, consciously or not, to interrogate this heavily gendered ideology once in action. Perhaps with Markham pushing from behind the scenes, this should not seem so surprising: Markham's relationship to polar exploration was always inflected with shades of campy homoeroticism, his love of theatrics at the poles influencing six decades of expeditions.

However, Markham repeatedly failed at soliciting public funds for the expedition, worsened only by the small amount fundraised from private donors. Realising his predicament, Markham enlisted the Royal Society, a learned society for science, to help lobby the government for a financed expedition, hoping that the scientific discoveries gained from an expedition to Antarctica would validate the serious costs involved in the eyes of potential wealthy stakeholders. Markham also underscored the perceived sense of manly trial that came with polar endeavours, glamorising the earlier days of Arctic exploration and the feats of heroism they entailed for the many wealthy men whose approval and funds he sought. The now-Joint Antarctic Committee of the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society managed to secure funds from the government in 1899.

The increasing importance of scientific rationales for the *Discovery* Expedition, however, resulted in confusion and tension: Markham's offer of co-

ownership of the expedition with the Royal Society allegedly gave the expedition two competing ideologies, naval versus scientific. From the outset, the Royal Society argued heavily for scientific leadership with a competent captain to navigate the seas and keep the boat in order so that the scientific contingent could set up camp on land for experiments. After significant manoeuvring by Markham, who “rejected absolutely the idea of using the *Discovery* merely to ferry a group of scientists to the ice and pick them up the following season” and believed that the expedition should be run on naval lines but include a scientific team, Robert Falcon Scott of the Royal Navy won the appointment and achieved full authority over the expedition.¹⁷ The scientific director, geologist John Walter Gregory, resigned in opposition. Resentment would linger. As polar historian T. Baughman relates, the contest between scientific enquiry and naval adventure was heated, explaining:

One part of the Joint Committee, generally the Royal Society members, wanted to focus on scientific study. Those men saw the expedition as a great opportunity for science and had less interest in adventure. For Markham and the RGS, geographical discovery was the cynosure of the project... Markham’s faction included a strong element of Royal Navy enthusiasts who saw this endeavour as a chance to replicate the glories of Arctic exploration of a half century earlier.¹⁸

It would be highly misleading to assume that this was a philosophical competition between two ideologies. Rather, it was a scramble for authority between two institutions with vested interests in the outcomes of the expedition. The Royal Geographical Society was desperate for a sensational, nationalistic success in light of its damaged reputation, and looked to Scott, his officers and

¹⁷ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 45.

¹⁸ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 39.

his sailors to bring home a narrative of feats of heroism and manly camaraderie. The Royal Society believed the best discoveries would be achieved with a scientist leading the expedition. Ultimately, Markham recognised that scientific enquiry could play a part in the success of this nationalistic expedition, believing that any “discovery” made by a British expedition was a means to build empire. He appointed five scientists while ensuring that Scott was firmly in command.

That science and naval authorities share common interests is hardly surprising. The pursuit of scientific understanding has always been interwoven with nation-building, particularly in Victorian Britain, where science held both a fundamental place in culture and was ostensibly the goal of much imperialism. Historian Max Jones has argued that Victorian exploration was a tripartite process of measuring the world, measuring manliness and measuring the boundaries of empire. He points out that “disinterested” forms of scientific enquiry helped construct imperial authority, as in the case of classification of natural phenomena through the use of imperialist names. Scott’s expedition would discover and name King Edward VII Land, a discovery and form of cultural work that helped underscore imperial superiority and justify the costly expense of the enterprise.¹⁹ Like imperialism, science too represents a form of invasion, an intervention into the natural world through its organisation and explanation of processes hitherto “undiscovered.” But much of the adventurous aspect of Scott’s journey, which helped construct a sense of British attachment and entitlement towards Antarctica, was fed back through scientific language too. The experience of polar ailments – the heroic fight against scurvy and frostbite – was often depicted in medical and meteorological terms in journals,

¹⁹ Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, 10, 44.

where the otherworldliness of the frozen continent was constructed through this alienating language of absurd, technical figures. These figures, such as drastically low temperature grades, then set the scene for readers, who imagined the “adventure” of the *Discovery* from the comfort of their armchairs.²⁰ Moreover, the literature of polar exploration can be viewed as a kind of “science fiction” through its blending of hyperrealist scientific descriptions and a sense of the unreal. It is a story of humans in an otherworldly, yet not implausible, setting.

Where science and the navy did in fact clash was through the Crossing the Line ceremony, a traditional Navy hazing ordeal. The *Discovery* set sail from England on 6 August 1902, with a crew of 47 men. Its official plan was geographic exploration and largely meteorological observations. There was to be no landing party (every man was to sleep on the ship) but numerous sledging excursions into the interior were planned. Unlike other expeditions, the crew of the *Discovery* was relatively heterogeneous: the Admiralty had only agreed to provide around 30 warrant officers, petty officers and sailors. As a result, Scott also enlisted Merchant Navy volunteers and civilians (carpenters and cooks) but only on the condition that they unambiguously accept Royal Navy rules before boarding the vessel.

²⁰ On Scott’s next and last expedition to Antarctica, the lines between these two ideologies became even further blurred during an expedition, known later as *The Worst Journey in the World*. Edward Wilson, Apsley Cherry-Garrard and Henry Bowers undertook a 140-mile journey to obtain a living Emperor Penguin embryo in the total darkness of winter 1911. At the time, it was thought that examining the embryo could prove the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and birds. For five weeks, these three men suffered beyond belief. Cherry-Garrard’s fingers froze on the second day and secreted pus at night; they all had constant, excruciating leg cramps; their clothes froze as hard as suits of armour; it took five hours in the morning just to dress and pack; it took half an hour of hard sledging just to thaw their garments; their tent became heavier and heavier as the moisture from their bodies froze inside it each night; the temperature dropped to -60°C; Cherry-Garrard’s teeth cracked from the cold; on one night, the stove used for cooking spat burning-hot penguin blubber into Wilson’s eye; finally, their tent blew away. They found an embryo and brought it back to Britain, where scientists unceremoniously declared the connection between dinosaurs and birds as inconclusive. But, somehow, they survived and Apsley Cherry-Garrard’s account of the adventure, undertaken for the pursuit of science, has frequently been voted the best travel book ever written. Fiennes, *Captain Scott*, 255, 260.

Scott faced many sources of antagonism on board the *Discovery*. Scientists were to be treated as officers, but found the navy system hard to accept. They were included in the expedition's strict classed segregation, eating, sleeping and socialising separately from the sailors. The lower decks, who had to accept that intellectual men with no naval experience were positioned above them in shipboard hierarchy, were tasked with many arduous but unappreciated tasks while the upper decks valiantly pursued their scientific discoveries. There was also a long history of animosity between Royal and Merchant Navies.²¹

On 31 August 1901, the *Discovery* crossed the equator; some of the men on board, including all the scientists, were entering the southern hemisphere for the first time and were subsequently subjected to a physical and mental ordeal, the Crossing the Line ceremony. The naval ritual, also observed by Norwegian Roald Amundsen, as discussed in my Introduction, resembled "a symbolic inversion of dignified judicial ceremonies."²² The fractious nature of the crew's composition, which would go on to trouble the expedition during their three-year stay and was reflected in its dramatic enterprises, was initially exposed during the ceremony, which signalled the beginning of the *Discovery*'s cross-dressing. The ceremony's purpose was to bring the fractured crew into one homosocial fold based on the aggressive manliness of the Royal Navy sailors, who dressed up that day and tortured others. While the ceremony failed to establish this order (Scott formally disciplined certain crewmembers after the initiation dissolved into an alcohol-fuelled mess), it did succeed in crystallising a different social

²¹ Fiennes, *Captain Scott*, 36.

²² Simon Bronner, *Crossing the Line: Violence, Play, and Drama in Naval Equator Traditions* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 39. The ceremony has its origins in sixteenth-century Western Europe, the first published accounts of the ceremony being performed on an English vessel dated at 1670. It continues in national navies today.

structure based on sobriety and bodily respect that anticipated the deathly environment waiting at the end of the ocean.

There was already excitable chatter about Father Neptune a few days before crossing the line, with Shackleton, third officer of the expedition, writing on 28 August that “Neptune is expected shortly, and we are going to keep the ceremony in time old style – there are a number of men in the wardroom as well as on the lower deck who have to be initiated.” Two days later, one of Neptune’s Tritons dressed in oilskins, long hair and a beard visited the crew. He spoke to the captain, “pausing in these enquiries every now and then to make a remark about special forms of baptism, which did not, I am sure, sound very pleasant to the little group of non-baptised who were hanging anxiously on the Triton’s words.”²³

The Triton was Petty Officer David Allan, who took the part of “His Majesty Neptune” two days later and would also appear as a star of *A Ticket-of-Leave*. The proclamations of the Triton caused serious concern among those who had not crossed the equator before: surgeon Reginald Koettlitz asked to have no part in it and was subsequently left alone.²⁴ Preparations went on: a platform was rigged above a huge bath of seawater made out of a sail, where the victim was to be thrown backwards and ducked by several waiting Tritons – Petty Officer MacFarlane, Able Seaman Frank Wild and Leading Seaman Pilbeam.

²³ Ernest Shackleton diary, 28 August 1901, MS 575/2;MJ, Scott Polar Research Institute; Shackleton diary, 30 August 1901.

²⁴ Thomas Hodgson diary, 31 August 1901, MS 595.



Figure 1: Actors in the Crossing the Line ceremony. Photograph by Charles Royds. Reproduced by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Around lunch, Neptune's Court arrived. They were greeted courteously by Scott, and began to sing and pass round two bottles of whisky. As evidenced in the photo above, the elaborate outfits spoke of the effort put into the event:

It consisted of King Neptune in an elaborate crown, and black oilskins chalked all over with fishes, long tow hair and beard, and a trident on which was stuck a dried cod; his Queen in flowered silks, pink cheeks and a mass of thin rope all down her back, a Lulu hat turned up on one side with red paper roses and so on. She carried binoculars made of two wine bottles and a silver wand. Then came a ludicrous doctor with a stethoscope, and soap pills and screwdrivers for teeth. Then two constables for whom we had policemen's clothes in the acting department, and three men in yellow oilskins and tow wigs to catch and duck us in the sail bath. Then also the barber with an enormous wooden razor, a plasterer with a bucket of soot and flour and soap made into fluid with a tallow, and after him a man with a bucket of flour.²⁵

²⁵ Edward Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition to the Antarctic Regions 1901-1904* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), 44.

It is worth noting that the policemen's outfits described in this passage denote premeditation: the importance of theatre in the common consciousness of polar exploration culture was enough to extend it to Antarctic shores. The hats came from the "acting department" on board, a theatrical kit of mostly donated make-up and costumes organised by Shackleton before departing Britain.²⁶ This performance of Neptune and His Court was not a reactive act of boredom on the sailors' part but a greatly anticipated event, and one could question how this production of theatre interrogates the production of heroism, both being expensive, time-consuming enterprises that arguably detract from one another. As Sarah Moss asks: "It is hard to know whether to be moved or appalled by those who, stocking the ships in preparation for several gruelling and desperate years, thought to include toy printing presses and women's clothes for dressing up when the earth shut down for the winter and there was no food."²⁷

The excitement reached near giddy levels; Neptune tried to make a speech but "what with laughing, drink, excitement and the audience, it was not a success."²⁸ The ordeal was severe: the victim was blindfolded, "wanged" over the head with a large pantomime razor, his teeth were examined with a screwdriver and a bar of soap forcibly pushed into his mouth. Soot, tallow and flour were then smeared on heads and faces and then removed with "the wooden razor till, in many cases, the blood came through the composition."²⁹ Finally, the victim was shoved backwards into the pool of water where he was repeatedly ducked.

²⁶ Leane, "Antarctic Theatricals," 146.

²⁷ Moss, *Scott's Last Biscuit*, 58–59.

²⁸ Charles Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN. Expedition to the Antarctic 1901-1904* (Braidwood: T. Roger Royds, 2001), 29.

²⁹ Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition*, 44.

Surgeon and biologist Edward Wilson was first to undergo the initiation: “The constables carried me bodily up to the platform, where the doctor made a ludicrous examination of me with his stethoscope.”³⁰ Fortunately for Wilson, the stool collapsed early and he fell into the bath before any proper abuse could commence. Hartley Ferrar, the geologist, was not so lucky and was made to doubly suffer as “he rather lost his wool.”³¹

While the ceremony began in its traditional, structured format, it ended in a chaotic, alcohol-fuelled ruckus. “The disguises in most cases soon disappeared and rather early in the proceedings Mrs. Neptune fell in the bath. Finally the whole party had a scrimmage in there.” Having enjoyed roughing up the senior men, Neptune’s Court went below deck to get blind drunk with alcohol saved up for the event. Marden became “very loquacious and critical” and there were arguments in the evening.³² One man had his thumb bitten through by another.³³

The next morning, there was indulgent gossip amongst the crew about the previous night. One man fainted on deck, presumably due to a hangover, while unwavering hangovers took their toll, biologist Thomas Hodgson noting, “No particular work was done.”³⁴ Scott disciplined the men: Marden, the ridiculously dressed queen of the day who was inebriated enough to plummet head first into the bath, was discharged and sentenced to be handed over to the authorities at the next port, Cape Town. Carpenter’s mate James Duncan, Seaman Walker and

³⁰ Wilson, *Diary of the ‘Discovery’ Expedition*, 44.

³¹ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 39.

³² Hodgson diary, 31 August 1901.

³³ Wilson, *Diary of the ‘Discovery’ Expedition*, 44.

³⁴ Hodgson diary, 31 August 1901.

Stoker Page were punished for their part in the debacle. Scott also gave a lengthy speech to the crew, asking that they reform their language.³⁵

The Crossing the Line ceremony, though seemingly a drunken disaster, actually revealed underlying insecurities over the common definition of masculinity among the crew. The pantomimic ceremony, performed almost entirely by Royal Navy men, created an opportunity to challenge the established social hierarchies on board by physically torturing the upper, intellectual class in a sanctioned dramatic space, with the scientists Wilson (surgeon, biologist), Ferrar (geologist) and Hodgson (biologist) hazed first and very aggressively. But more than opportunistic violence, the ceremony sought, in fact, to unify the separate groups – scientific, seaman, Navy officers, merchant seaman, civilians – on board, to bring the men into one homosocial fold in order to confirm the prevailing, and allegedly necessary, naval manhood required of this kind of adventure.

As anthropologist Simon Bronner relates, Neptune and his trident, a symbol of phallic power, “apotheosizes the father figure at seas as an inversion of the ‘motherland.’ He provides a model of phallic manliness for the initiates to follow.” The otherworldly ceremony, in its bizarreness and structured quirky narrative of Neptune’s arrival, proclamations and subsequent torture, attempted to affirm from the bottom up a new order of nautical masculinity based on the

³⁵ In the end, Scott relented and only discharged Marden. Yelverton, *Antarctica Unveiled*, 78. The troubled result of the ceremony is in some ways not unsurprising: the Crossing the Line ceremony has always existed concurrently with protest at its violence. From 1614, when the Dutch East India Company prohibited ritual dousing due to reported injuries, to the release of videotapes showing brutal hazing in the U.S. Navy in 1997, Crossing the Line ceremonies have created as much distaste from third parties and participants as they have done to facilitate male-bonding, which is a surprising outcome considering that “the Naval ceremony is the most pervasive and institutionalized, and maybe the most narratively complicated or dramatic, of the initiations by dousing and hazing.” Bronner, *Crossing the Line*, 50, 27.

rougher attributes of discipline, toughness, hierarchy and aggressiveness.³⁶

Furthermore, it served to encourage collectivism among the different classes on board, and then a sense of separatism from the world, even elitism. This sense of exclusivity, from women and from other men, is a familiar aspect of all-male environments; Antarctica itself was similarly imagined as a gender-exclusive space for masculine trial, the antithesis of the motherland.³⁷ The Crossing the Line ceremony, then, served as a symbolic transition into this new space that underscored “getting away from the... social and intellectual pack. Often perceived to be connected to home, land, mother, and family [are] seen to hold the coming-of-age boy back.”³⁸

Relatively speaking, however, the ceremony ended in failure. When blood was drawn on the *Discovery* and the seamen were debilitatingly hungover the next day, Scott intervened to establish that physical harm, whether self-inflicted or not, was unacceptable. Drinking was subsequently frowned upon, a departure from the significantly more heady days of Arctic exploration in the 1850s when men stumbled through the snow in ludicrous masquerade costumes. The sailors were disciplined and many of the scientific crew were left humiliated and in pain rather than welcomed initiates into a naval, masculine brotherhood.

There was already a perceivable focus on the body that created distaste for the violent acts of the hazing ordeal. Beyond the “Line” was ostensibly unknown space, space that was to be mapped through righteous, manly perseverance of Antarctic environment, endless night and extreme social environment. Only robust, moral and, as will be shown, attractive men could

³⁶ Bronner, *Crossing the Line*, 44, 49.

³⁷ For example, in homosocial fraternities at colleges in America in the nineteenth century, fraternity brothers would define their very masculinity through the exclusion of other male and all female students. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, 3.

³⁸ Bronner, *Crossing the Line*, 47.

succeed in planting the British flag on Antarctica. The blood seen dripping through the scalp of scientists was not a welcome image, reminding Scott of the actual frailty of the human body, however much he attempted to augment it in an aura of heroic hardiness. Scott believed that had drinking, aggressiveness and rough handling become mechanisms for releasing pent-up tension, as in other expeditions, the crew of the *Discovery* would not be so successful. As such, Father Neptune helped graphically underscore the preciousness of his ideals.

However, the manner in which the sailors were rebuked by the ship's authorities for their part in the ceremony – a long, rich tradition in the navy – also suggests that the aura of heroic masculinity that Scott sought to perpetuate was closed off to the lower decks. The sailors were denied the right to redefine or comment on the social construction of the elitist, upper class “explorer,” their allegedly rougher ideals of manliness being decried and punished in the process by the captain. This suggests that Scott and his officers actually nursed concerns over their insecure definition of manhood, based as it was on feelings of superiority over others, and did not welcome any incursion onto what they believed was necessary of heroic manhood.

In sum, the aura of healthy manliness that augmented the expedition was not to be disrupted by Neptune, soap and screwdrivers, and Scott's intervention was the first step in formalising this attitude. In this respect, the Father Neptune ceremony affirmed this elitist ideal of masculinity not through its success but through its failings: while it may not have established an order of masculine aggressiveness – the type of rough, gnarly spirit supposedly needed of and by the Royal Navy culture – it did succeed in helping to formalise an altogether

different order characterised by virility, sobriety and strenuous work, alleged imperial attributes.

Two dead, three to a bag

Feeling cold was an everyday, all-day occurrence for the officers, scientists and sailors of the *Discovery*. Not only did the temperature aggregate bodies, turning sleeping bags into sites of shared corporeal, perhaps even sexual, warmth. It also affected subjectivity. Where explorers were defined as heroic individuals who traverse space in the name of nationalistic cause, they became immobilised, frustrated subjects in a dominating environment. As such, the ambient temperatures also contracted the explorers' sense of spatiality, shrinking the Great White South into an adverse limited – and potentially deadly – landscape, one, however, that could be overcome through the heroic activities of the white, masculine body.

As literacy expanded and as literate crewmembers increased in number by the twentieth century, so did the number of expedition journals. Nearly every diary entry in the journals of the crew begins with some mention of the climatic conditions in Antarctica. Captain Scott's own collection of entries detailing the first winter of 1902 notes from the outset the crew's fascination with the vicissitudes of weather: "It can be readily understood, however, that what is usually conceded to be an easily exhausted conversational topic, the weather, was to us at this time a matter of extraordinary importance."³⁹ Wilson's entries in the first winter of 1902 uniformly start with meteorological observations,

³⁹ Robert Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2009), 222.

explained for the reader: “A very cold day, i.e. a day on which one feels the cold. Often it means that the actual temperature is higher than usual and there is some wind and the air is not so dry.”⁴⁰

The sailors shared in the wonder too, though diary entries tended to contain less flowery prose than that of the officers, whose words have been weighted heavily by many histories of the expedition. Nevertheless, the seamen’s descriptions of each day would routinely begin with nods to the climate such as “Fine hard morning” and “Weather still very cold.”⁴¹ Ackermann’s social history of air-conditioning in America suggests that climatic variations had a tendency to expose class distinctions, as the working classes – unable to afford the new technology – struggled to cope with the onslaught of heat waves in urban homes.⁴² The opposite was true of the *Discovery*. In an expedition that was spatially segregated along class lines in everything from sleeping to eating to excreting, the experience of low temperature did not differ much among the men, but instead proved a cohesive force that served to unify the different contingents on board through its alien nature. Though lower-deck kitchens and engine rooms often would have been warmer than elsewhere, generally the cold was all encompassing.

For example, a concert held in early May gave pause for thought as each man, dressed in multiple layers, came to notice the absurdity of the situation. Wilson, a doctor and scientist very popular with both officers and sailors, described the scene with a boyish sense of wonder.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Diary of the ‘Discovery’ Expedition*, 152.

⁴¹ James Duncan diary, 6 August 1902, MS. 1415, Scott Polar Research Institute; A. Ellis, ed., *Under Scott’s Command: Lashly’s Antarctic Diaries* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), 41.

⁴² Ackermann, *Cool Comfort*, 14. Clare also asserts that vulnerability to cold is also heavily classed, as poverty makes payment for shelter and additional clothing difficult. “Feeling Cold,” 180.

It was a funny show altogether, as we were all very cold (or rather the place was). We were all in our hoods, blouses and overcoats and felt boots, and the place was darkened by the light of a few oil lamps, yet we all enjoyed ourselves and the choruses were full and hearty. The coming home too to the ship was full of strange recollections of times when we had come home in wintry weather and snow at home, from some amateur theatricals or concert at the schools of a country village.⁴³

Wilson rendered the climate as the Other, an omnipresent oppositional force that served to bind together a relatively disparate and occasionally fractious crew through its sheer, frightening totality. This Otherness was not simply external, but came to reside within bodies as the coldness encroached between the seams of countless jackets to permeate skin. The inevitable, sweeping nature of the darkness is also suggested through Wilson's description of the oil lamps, which, when lit, did not so much brighten the place but rather accentuate its darkness. Following this description, Wilson immediately counters it with "yet we all enjoyed ourselves," thereby using this conjunction to juxtapose from the outset the emotion of cheer against the climate, as though they were two opposing, mutually incomprehensible forces.

It was not only the experience of extreme temperatures that provided communal bonding among the officers and men, who relished the novelty of being wrapped up in countless hats, scarves and coats. The natural beauty of the Antarctic had a profound effect too. Weather permitting, nearly all the men enjoyed an almost spiritual communion with the landscape. They needed no encouragement to leave the ship from Scott, who himself looked upon his surroundings like a painting, fascinated by the many colours that could be

⁴³ Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition*, 138.

occasionally found in this usually uniformly white space: “The western sky was very beautiful this afternoon when I went for my walk after tea; the hills in deep shadow were sharply outlined against a background of crimson, fading through saffron to pale green, which merged into the slaty blue of a greater altitude. As the light failed the stars shone forth wonderfully bright and clear.”⁴⁴ Arguably, this constant objectification of the polar landscape served to remove the explorer from that very landscape in which he was situated, thereby creating a felt distance between person and environment (even in reminiscing cold weather at home, Wilson renders winterscapes as “strange”). In European colonies, a strategy of promulgating certain visual characteristics of landscapes, that is, enjoying their picturesqueness and depicting it in art, furthered Western conceptions of and relationships to land.⁴⁵ Similarly, regarding Antarctic landscapes as picturesque, as Scott does above, separated the subject (the explorer) from the object (the landscape), and rendered the land as a form of spectacle – something to be experienced as a novelty, and to be mapped with colonial sentiment. This inadvertently assigned the landscape a level of power that could alienate and scare: Antarctic landscape was sublime in the Kantian sense; it existed as a massive totality generating fear and awe, its powerful complexity threatening to overwhelm the human ability to comprehend.⁴⁶

Enjoyment and novelty aside, throughout this period blizzards raged: their “blinding, bewildering” effects caused men to get lost with ease, with

⁴⁴ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 227.

⁴⁵ For example, the building of stationary homes (permanent habitation) and deforestation/arable farming (power over nature) both served as popular foci in painting. The “idea of the picturesque proved to be a powerful framing device for the way in which non-Western cultures came to be perceived, represented, and colonized.” Eric Hirsch, “Introduction: Landscape between place and place,” in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, ed. Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

⁴⁶ Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Badlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 56.

physicist Louis Bernacchi and engineer Reginald Skelton going missing for two and a half hours while returning from the hut to the ship, a distance of some 200 yards.⁴⁷ The crew was simply unprepared, inexperienced and inadequately equipped. Death was not an unfounded fear: earlier in the year Seaman George Vince fell off a cliff.

Vince's death, though only one of two that occurred during the *Discovery*, can hardly be considered an anomaly, in that deaths did happen during polar expeditions, especially among the working classes. The case-in-point example would be John Franklin's stupefying failure of management in 1845 that saw a hundred of "his men" die during his insane quest for heroic validation. Similarly, Vince's death could be blamed on poor management, the relative speed with which it was forgotten suggestive of the lower-class cost of polar exploration.

The first tragedy of the *Discovery* expedition was the death of Able Seaman Charles Bonner. As the *Discovery* was leaving port in New Zealand, the sailor fell from the ship's mainmast onto an iron deckhouse. The event was witnessed by hordes of cheering crowds. Though Bonner was already quite popular by the time of his death, the incident did not cause much grief, at least not for Scott, a reminder that though these men came to regard themselves as a brotherhood, a kind of domesticated, mostly functioning family, elite naval codes underpinned their society, calling for a clinical approach to emotion when required. Scott wrote: "Bonner was a smart young seaman... but in the busy life

⁴⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 257–59.

we were now leading there was little time for sad thought, and the gloom of this unfortunate accident was rapidly dispelled in the activities of the voyage.”⁴⁸

Like the “unfortunate accident” of Bonner’s death, Vince’s untimely end was also a singular event in Scott’s narrative, passed over fairly quickly. However, it is possible to read more into Vince’s death: it disrupted the sense of adventure on which this fraternity thrived, bringing the men’s ideas of glory back down to the harsh, frozen earth. It underscored that a quick, clean death was just as possible as prolonged starvation, freezing or madness, a frightening prospect made all the more terrifying by the fact that Vince died just before winter, when men’s minds were beginning to ruminate on dark possibilities. Furthermore, while the officers and sailors started camping it up with their showy weightlifting and racy drag, Vince helps remind the reader that all was not fun, especially for the lower decks of sailors, out of whom both deaths had occurred. They would have felt the effects most poignantly.

After securing winter quarters at Hut Point in McMurdo Sound, Scott – out of action with an injured knee – ordered a sledging trip to Cape Crozier to leave details of winter quarters for the relief ships due the following summer. On the return journey, Lieutenant Barne walked with a group of nine men under his command, mostly from the mess deck, along a ridge near the *Discovery*’s location. A harsh wind picked up, causing a whiteout, but the close proximity of the winter camp led Barne to decide, wrongly, that his group should continue down the ridge regardless. Believing they would be home in an hour, Barne’s group became separated and in the confusion, Vince veered too close to some sheer ice cliffs that the group had no idea they were traversing directly above.

⁴⁸ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 87.

Vince's body was never found, but the large cross that Scott ordered be constructed and erected in his memory can still be found not far from where he died. A service was held on the Sunday, after which the crew were subdued for a week. Barne was privately blamed for Vince's death by Scott but never formally or publically disciplined.⁴⁹ Not much more mention was made of Vince, not among the officers anyway, though the grief of the lower decks – particularly among Vince's friends and bunkmates – would have been more palpable. Scott took some comfort in the fact that "death must have come quickly in the grip of that icy sea" – though, in truth, if Vince did not die from the fall, he likely would have endured an excruciating death by drowning or freezing.⁵⁰ Just as quickly as Vince's death may have come in Scott's rendering, Scott's narrative of the *Discovery* moved forward. However, Vince's death surely had a profound effect on the common consciousness of the expedition during the coming winter, serving to remind the men of the sheer, brutal force of the surroundings.

The men frequently stayed on board the *Discovery* during especially adverse weather, only venturing out to take scientific observations, a process that hinged on whether the equipment itself had frozen over. Inside the ship the men, clad in Russian felt boots, still negotiated the cold, as the insulation scheme was "very imperfect." In the wardroom the officers were forced to hack their mattresses from ice built up along the sides of the boat, which on the seas leaked spectacularly. At night, the temperature in cabins could plummet down to 0.5°C. Bewilderingly, despite these low temperatures half of the men insisted on proper ventilation for its health benefits, opening skylights every morning at 07.30 a.m.

⁴⁹ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 121.

⁵⁰ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 179.

to the chagrin of the remainder of the men.⁵¹ Lighting was also an issue; the windmill built to run lamps had proved problematic from the outset, being no match for Antarctic wind, and was subsequently the butt of many jokes throughout the minstrel show later in the summer.⁵² Kerosene lamps and candles were used instead, creating a horrid, foggy atmosphere. Added to this, smoking was frequent, with the wardroom alone smoking about six or seven pounds of tobacco a month.⁵³ Taken together, these conditions produced a cramped and claustrophobic setting for the men to navigate together.

However, it was during sledging excursions into the interior that the effects of low temperatures on bodily interaction were felt most. Three-man sleeping bags, warmer and weighing less than three one-man bags, brought the bodies of explorers close together to produce shared warmth, if sometimes unsuccessfully:

The first half-hour is spent in constant shifting and turning as each inmate of the bag tries to make the best of his hard mattress or to draw the equally hard covering closer to him... Suddenly the bag begins to vibrate, and we know that someone has got the *shivers*. It is very contagious, this shivering, the paroxysm after paroxysm passes through the whole party. We do not try and check it: the violent shaking has a decidedly warming effect... Our hands are tucked away in some complicated fashion that experience has commended: they are useless for exploring.⁵⁴

Lying together, the men wriggled and shook next to one another to achieve inadequate warmth, their perpetual movement juxtaposed against the frozen-solid

⁵¹ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 179, 239. This attitude to ventilation was common at the time: the “fresh-air movement” of the late nineteenth century trumpeted the curative nature of breathing in healthy outdoor environments. Charlie Hailey, “From Sleeping Porch to Sleeping Machine: Inverting Traditions of Fresh Air in North America,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 10:2 (2009): 29.

⁵² Albert Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic, Being the Narrative of the British National Antarctic Expedition* (Suffolk: Paradigm Press and Bluntisham Books, 1984), 119.

⁵³ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 138.

⁵⁴ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 328. Author’s emphasis.

sleeping bag. As Clare notes, as opposed to coldness, which suggests an impersonal void, “warmth indexes a sociality,” it is a shared experience, as warm bodies are able to feel each other’s warmth when touching. This sharedness of bodily temperature reminds humans that they do not, in fact, feel something separate from one other.⁵⁵ Lying in the tent, these men surely felt this sense of basic, biological humanity when struggling to locate each other’s warmth. Furthermore, this approach to generating heat defied class boundaries, in that officer would share sleeping bag with sailor. The coldness proved so overwhelming that it reduced men to their basic humanity, rendering socially produced segregations such as class as suddenly senseless.

The three-man bag also opened up possibilities for intimate contact among men in an intensely homosocial environment. It is difficult to know how to read shades of homoeroticism in these scenes: the severe temperature had, most likely, a physiological effect on sex drive. However, the mention of “exploring hands” undoubtedly opens up a realm of supposition. If their hands had not been “useless,” in Scott’s staid managerial phrasing, the access to each other’s bodies would have been welcomed. Nevertheless, the interlocking of these male bodies and the fixation on the heat produced by their proximity – a kind of corporeal, natural energy – suggests some level of interactive, physical intimacy. Interesting in this example is that the intimacy here was shared between three men, rather than two. This intimacy between multiple bodies, as opposed to a dyad, represents at least a disruption to normative coupled affections. Regardless of the existence of sexual contact, the very humbling image of heroic figures cuddled together is significant, as is how such intimacy

⁵⁵ Clare, “Feeling Cold,” 176.

has been related in historiography. As Bloom amply argues, “Examples of the men sleeping together in tents or on a ship, which emphasise the closeness of their gendered, physical bodies, are ignored and replaced by descriptions of moral character.”⁵⁶

The darkness of the polar night gave the men an austere band of red light on the horizon for a few hours if skies were clear. This “weary spell of darkness” was the subject of subdued consternation too: “When there are clouds all over the sky the Antarctic is indeed a very dark place, and the snow light hardly distinguishes itself from the blackest rock.”⁵⁷ In accepted polar literary fashion, the speculation over the effects of this relentless darkness produced an introspective narrative in most of the officers’ and sailors’ diaries. Royds wrote, in the saddest manner, “we try to inspire each other with a sort of superficial effervescence of good cheer, but such moods are short lived. Physically, mentally, and perhaps morally, then, we are depressed... I know that this depression will increase with advance of the night, and far into the increasing dawn of next summer.”⁵⁸ Constant observation of the body and mind meant that the slightest sign of ill health became a source of anxiety, an anxiety that quickly became sexualised, as will be shown.

There was a lingering, threatening impulse to keep oneself above winter depression. The manner in which this impulse was reflected in the ship’s ordering points to William Edward Parry’s lasting influence over polar exploration; he loomed over not one, but two frozen poles. The officers, scientists and men had a timetable of daily obligations and rituals: cleaning chores, scientific work, church, exercise, debates, magic-lantern shows and

⁵⁶ Bloom, “Arctic Spaces,” 33.

⁵⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 205; Wilson, *Diary of the ‘Discovery’ Expedition*, 153.

⁵⁸ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 143.

occasional educational endeavours were intended to stave off depression and provide structure. A newspaper was published on board, each man was assigned a dog to care for and the occasional hearty sing-along endured. Theatre, though hardly as regular as in the earlier days of polar exploration, was no less a crucial component of placating Antarctic society.

Frostbite formed the most articulated interaction with extreme temperature. Frostbite, damage to the skin and other tissues through exposure and freezing, made the invisible visible: it was the gruesome, physical manifestation of cold temperature, turning the usually subjective experience of feeling cold into a legitimate ailment. The crew, who were relatively reticent and unwilling to gripe over the lack of physical comfort, which was considered a “feminine indulgence and a masculine vice,” suffered a relentless interaction between skin and temperature, experiencing regular pain from freezing and then the difficult thawing of tissue.⁵⁹ A limited amount of exposure could result in harm, with drifting snow being described like a “sand blast” to the face, pricking the skin and bringing frostbite with “alarming rapidity.” Even during appreciative moments of calm reflection, the incessant incursion of frostbite onto the body prohibited any prolonged enjoyment. On deck after midwinter festivities, Scott wrote:

It was calm and clear, and the full moon, high in the heavens, flooded the snow with its white pure light; overhead a myriad stars irradiated the heaven, whilst pale shafts of the aurora australis grew and waned in the southern sky... Eventually even exuberance of spirit was forced to give way to rapidly growing frost-bites, and we retired within to contemplate, rather sadly, our extremities swelling as they

⁵⁹ Ackermann, *Cool Comfort*, 19.

thawed. Clearly under no conditions can one play tricks with our climate.⁶⁰

The environment, then, created impenetrable, inaccessible spaces, drastically reducing the explorers' mobility both outside and in: their relationship with the beautiful landscape was regulated by encroachment of frostbite, while even within the relative comfort of sleeping bag and cabin the men were forced to negotiate the cold.

The result was an imposing regime that temporarily rendered the crewmembers, men who sought to discover new space through aggressive incursion, as immobile subjects in a spatially constricted, mood-affecting environment – potentially deadly, especially for sailors. There were consequences. Although journals tended to describe daily life on board the *Discovery* as congenial, entries were sometimes written through gritted teeth. At times, they were outright angry in tone. Frustration erupted into violence between men. “On several occasions, fisticuffs settled minor disputes.”⁶¹ Officers quarrelled: one day Wilson got “deadly sick with everyone,” the difficulties of being separated from the “better half of humanity,” getting the better of him.⁶² A frustrated Engineer Reginald Skelton claimed in his diary that Royds was too “girlish” to lead a sledging party. Thus did at least two sets of disputes, aggravated by climate, get filtered through the politics of gender.⁶³ In sum, the physical, mental and social drain of extremely cold weather continued to agitate the officers and sailors throughout their stay, but it would also affect polar expedition society in more startlingly gendered and sexualised ways.

⁶⁰ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 240.

⁶¹ Baughman, *Pilgrims on Ice*, 143.

⁶² Baughman, *Pilgrims on Ice*, 129.

⁶³ Larson, *An Empire of Ice*, 154. Skelton believed Royds was not cut out for sledging, telling Scott so. He privately admonished Royds on other occasions in his journals.

Discovery of the male form

Surviving the daily threat of the environment, the body of the explorer was drastically reduced in its capabilities during the *Discovery* Expedition, falling far short of what crip theorists such as Robert McRuer label able-bodiedness, that is, an impossible and incomprehensible achievement defined diametrically against disability and not dissimilar to Judith Butler's exposition of heterosexuality as being "always deferred and thus never really guaranteed."⁶⁴ McRuer's theory has implications for the *Discovery* Expedition: when the body became compromised, repetitive performative actions such as bodybuilding were necessitated to maintain a level of felt authority over the corporeal self and the environment. However, these performative acts quickly became inflected with queer desire, the environment eroticising individuated and aggregated heroic bodies.

The performance of able-bodiedness began before the expedition cast off from British shores. Masculine, beautiful bodies were intimately tied to nationalistic sentiment and the expansion of empire: the heroic, individuated man was at the vanguard of the West's civilising mission. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, widespread social transformations such as women's emancipation, class upheavals, urbanisation, the death of Queen Victoria in early 1901 and the South African Wars were threatening these contemporary understandings of masculinity. Men such as Markham decided that Antarctica was a suitable destination to restore both the Royal Geographical Society's reputation and stabilise ailing British manhood overall, his admiration harkening

⁶⁴ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9.

back to the heroic suffering of earlier Arctic exploration. Markham believed polar spaces were playgrounds of “trial by ice,” where heroic figures succumbed gratuitously to frostbite, scurvy and depression only to come back national heroes and affect understandings of what it meant to be a man. Crucially, intense environmental conditions, and the physical and mental aptitude required to survive in them, rendered polar spaces as sites of restorative masculinity, as suggested by Markham and recently interrogated by scholar Clare: “Faced with winter’s chill, white masculinity reasserts its possession of the world by framing the cold as strengthening the white, masculine constitution and projecting this white, masculine body through the cold.”⁶⁵ Climatic temperatures were infused with the politics of gender. However, the quickening of queer desire produced in and by extremely cold climates critiques the constitution of this possessive whiteness.

Scott purposefully chose young men for his expedition, of whom apparently there were many advantages.⁶⁶ His keen admiration for slim waistlines and attractive physical form suggests physical beauty was one such advantage. David Serlin notes that medical inspections of military recruits in the U.S. military in the nineteenth century were heavily influenced by appearance, that is, visible, verifiable evidence of superior muscles, chests, limbs and so forth. This diagnostic model “barely disguises the titillating quality of [the] description of a beautiful male body.”⁶⁷ There was a similarity in American explorer Robert Peary’s selection of men, based as it was on visual characteristics, for his attempt at the North Pole. Robert Bartlett, the captain of the ship, represented Peary’s idealised kind of masculinity: “Blue-eyed, brown-

⁶⁵ Clare, “Feeling Cold,” 183.

⁶⁶ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 58.

⁶⁷ Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity,” 157.

haired, stocky, and steel muscled.”⁶⁸ This attention to Bartlett’s aesthetic features betrays Peary’s own preoccupation with muscular form implying it was a precondition for inclusion in imperial activity.

The kind of gender-exclusive, restorative endeavour that Scott commanded was also reflected in Peary’s accounts of his decade-long quest to reach the North Pole. Peary’s narrative “constructs himself and the other members of his expedition as ideal men whose stable identities are exemplified by their successful struggle against the ‘elements.’”⁶⁹ He also cast the environment as the Other, an oppositional force against which heroism could be successfully measured, the threatening cold a means to reassert masculinity.

Scott, like Peary, rendered his men as “ideal” in his published account, revelling in their spunky youth and virility from early on. In the process he created a narrative that at times diverged from normative, masculine sexuality, itself allegedly part and parcel of normative corporeal experience, that is, able-bodiedness. Scott wrote, “One has but to cast one’s eye over the records that come from this quarter to realise what a splendid set of men we have from the point of view of physique. Some turn the scale at over 190 lbs., and several at over 180 lbs., without an ounce of superfluous fat.”⁷⁰ If the pervasive coldness had entered the body, Othering it from within, then the performance of flexing muscle and rigorous exercise was an attempt to try and exorcise it out. Exercise was so valued that the captain remarked, “The officers are only too eager to go out for a breath of fresh air... and in fine weather need no spur to be out and

⁶⁸ Robert Peary, *The North Pole: Its Discovery in 1909 under the Auspices of the Peary Arctic Club* (Mineola: Dover, 1986), cited in Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 37.

⁶⁹ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 35.

⁷⁰ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 308.

about with a football or a ski.”⁷¹ The men even played some games of football on the ice in temperatures as low as -35°C.⁷²

During the monthly weigh-ins enforced by the expedition’s two doctors, a mutual appreciation of bodies actively flourished to become part of the overall philosophy of this polar expedition. The entire crew, “clad in pyjamas,” had their weight taken, arms and legs weighed and the power of their grip measured. If there was any doubt on the performative nature of this kind of bodybuilding, Scott wrote: “This performance is an entertainment in itself, and bets are freely offered and taken on the results, especially by those who fondly hope for a smaller waist or a stronger grip.”⁷³ These medical inspections became quite the event on board the *Discovery*:

On the 1st of each month throughout our stay in the Antarctic regions, the two doctors made measurements of every man on board the ship. Our chests, waists, biceps, forearms, and calves, all had the tape passed around them... These operations always created a lot of merriment... a quarter of an inch would be disputed in the other measurements, in order to prove that the muscular development of one of our youthful members exceeded that of another.⁷⁴

Like the sanctioned space of theatrical stage, discussed below, and as already addressed in Chapter 1, which introduced the erotics of inspection, normative structures during weigh-ins were sufficiently relaxed to allow men to notice and admire other men. Where Parry’s official narrative silenced all others, however, the range of records from the *Discovery* immediately confirmed that a sensory fetishisation of the male body was at work across a number of accounts, a shared gaze that legitimised contemplation of masculine beauty directly. Scott and the

⁷¹ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 214.

⁷² Baughman, *Pilgrims on Ice*, 137.

⁷³ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 216.

⁷⁴ Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 120.

men, enthusiastic diary keepers, provide sufficient evidence of the kind of same-sex longing that this thesis argues was operative throughout the history of polar exploration.

Passages were filled with titillating description of men's bodies. The vocabulary used was not formal or scientific but rather intimate and unabashed. Consider the following extract from second-in-command Albert Armitage's published journal:

Wilson had a trick of drawing in his breath until his ribs bulged out in a most extraordinary manner and his waist became most attenuated. We would gaze on him with admiration, and, like a lot of children, would say, "Do it again." The chest expansion of some of the crew was very fine indeed and their physical proportions would have called forth admiration from the Sandowists.⁷⁵

Most striking in Armitage's account, full of superlatives concerning impressive physicality, is his mention of the "Sandowists," a reference to Prussian bodybuilder Eugen Sandow and his many followers. Sandow, considered something of a living Greek statue, was the father of modern bodybuilding and the first man to make a comfortable living by displaying his muscular physique. He internationalised muscular culture in the late nineteenth century, embarking on global tours exhibiting his abilities before publishing successful "how-to" books. Sandow saw physical culture "not simply as entertainment, but as moral crusade, racial necessity, and also business opening," believing that it was a responsibility of the current generation to raise the standards of the entire human race by working out. To help deliver his message, he founded a magazine in 1898, the aptly named *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*. A range of

⁷⁵ Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 121.

material graced the inside: men were photographed performing extraordinary feats of physical might, instructions were given on new exercises with diagrams featuring near-nude men, and Sandow answered the questions of anxious would-be bodybuilders with the utmost confidence of the curative nature of his sport: “Stammering can be cured by getting your body into good condition,” he wrote.⁷⁶

Greg Mullins’ study of *Physical Culture*, a similar publication from the same decade, has relevance to Sandow’s magazine and the culture of erotic bodies on board *Discovery*. There is little evidence to suggest that either magazine set out to promote sex between men; however, Mullins makes a strong argument that *Physical Culture* could be considered “proto-porn” in that its erotic images, disguised as holistic health manuals of aesthetic value, in fact created room for images of naked bodies in the expanding medium of mass-distributed photo magazines. In many cases, the publishers of holistic health periodicals would actually go on to produce pornographic material.⁷⁷ If images of men bodybuilding were among the first forms of erotic photography, then Armitage’s visual appreciation of his men’s bodies could be similarly read as having latent sexual elements.

Mullins suggests that physical-culture magazines generated a feeling of inadequacy among their readers, who compared their own bodies to the glamorised muscular forms pictured. The reader’s desire to possess a bodily form “slips into and strategically veils the desire to possess someone else’s masculine body.” Sandow’s innovation was not a dissimilar strategy, which lay not in drawing attention to the strength of the male physique but rather to the *look* of

⁷⁶ Scott, “Body-Building and Empire-Building,” 79.

⁷⁷ Mullins, “Nudes, Prudes and Pigmies,” 28.

his male physique. The fact that Bernarr Macfadden, the editor of *Physical Culture*, was tried for obscenity demonstrates that many understood the eroticism inherent in the magazine and that admiration of the near-nude male was far from innocent.⁷⁸

On board *Discovery*, the desire for a muscular body can be viewed as slipping into the desire for another's body – the desire *to be* often indexing the desire *to have* or possess. The men's competition for biggest muscles was the pursuit of a bodily form not currently their own. As already shown, among those who admired muscularity most were more senior men: Armitage commented with envy on the youthful bodies in the crew, even rendering himself childlike when he admired Wilson's trick of drawing his breath in. During inspections, the men observed one another so attentively that they described the changes they saw in their journals, noting when crewmembers were looking pale or putting on extra "flesh." At one point, Hodgson shaved off his moustache and to the others looked "an awful horror. These monthly measurements are always great fun."⁷⁹

While the diary entries detailing inspections were all positive in their appreciation of muscles, none articulated a loss of or fear of losing muscle. On the one hand, this certainly reads as a discursive silence surrounding bodily fear over the danger of the climate. By not articulating their greatest fears, they spoke the unspeakable, only assigning the climate more power. But it is also possible that the men thought something more was at stake if they lost muscle: their own sexual standing. In an expedition society indexed along class, gender and racial hierarchies, it is possible that the eroticism assigned to bodybuilding betrayed another hierarchy, a sexual one, with the leanest, most chiselled men sitting at

⁷⁸ Mullins, "Nudes, Prudes and Pigmies," 36, 29.

⁷⁹ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 253.

the top of the pack regardless of other social standings. Homoerotic appreciation by Armitage and Scott assigned these men a greater share of masculine capital, temporarily disrupting the hierarchy of explorer, his officers and their sailors. However, this was not solely a process of validation but also one of humiliation. The silence in diaries about authors losing their own muscle exposed just how emasculating this result would be in their physical culture.

While a culture of bodybuilding and appreciation of physicality developed throughout the nineteenth century, polar explorers also came to be seen as the “epitome of manliness.”⁸⁰ The synthesis of these two discourses can be found in the attention given to physicality during these monthly inspections. The result was that the polar explorer’s quantifiable, appearance-based characteristics – weight, calf size, bicep size – became ingrained in the social construction of masculinity back home, Scott and his men both concerned with popular notions of masculinity and greatly perpetuating them. But there was, as Serlin and others note, an obvious correlation between superior physique and superior morality in late-nineteenth-century military environments, in that the performance of manly exercise could help produce moral perfection.⁸¹ Similarly, a lack of manly activity was thought to lead to vice, as already discussed in Chapter 1. Parry had been pedantically on guard against scurvy, an illness he thought caused by lax morals and poor hygiene and indicative of same-sex contact between men. Suggestively, Scott too nursed a deep-seated fear of the disease.⁸²

As discussed already, Warwick Anderson has shown that military authorities believed that Philippine tropical climates degenerated the morality of

⁸⁰ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 6.

⁸¹ Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity,” 157.

⁸² Fiennes, *Captain Scott*, 75.

American soldiers, resulting in “detrimental” social behaviours. In the British context, Africa, which had been colonised by the empire, loomed large in the colonial imaginary as a similar part-tropical space of metaphorical darkness.⁸³ Scott, who served in Africa, would be well aware of this discourse surrounding the allegedly degrading effects of hot tropical climates on men. In Antarctica, another colonial space, this climatic discourse was surely also at play. But where tropical climates were thought to weaken the will, leading to inertia, drunkenness and sexual indulgence, polar environments were also sufficiently alien to create an overriding fear of degeneration of the white, male body.⁸⁴ These fears were not unfounded: by Scott’s expedition, there had been many polar expeditions that had succumbed to violence and internal conflict of which the crew were aware. Franklin’s expeditionary force, of course, had died *en masse*.⁸⁵ As such, those in charge on the *Discovery* were hoping to circumvent through exercise and inspection the tropical malaise of the colonies, recontextualised to the harrowing darkness of Antarctic spaces, and the moral if not managerial lapses that supposedly came with them.⁸⁶

⁸³ Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 89.

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 11.

⁸⁵ The crew was well versed in the horror stories of previous expeditions as the library on board was stocked with accounts of Arctic exploration and was popular with the men. Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 215. Examples in the shelves abounded: American Adolphus Greely’s Lady Franklin Bay Expedition in 1881–84 saw 19 of the 25 men perish, and it was widely suspected that cannibalism was practised. The expedition failed because it was rife with aggression and threats of violent mutiny from within the ranks. Dick, *Muskox Land*, 207.

⁸⁶ While there was no written mention of neurasthenia during the expedition, a psychological condition first popularised in America in the late 1860s and epidemic in the colonies, it is a relevant departure point when considering the spectre of depression and anxiety that hung over the first winter in 1902. Neurasthenia was thought to occur when the human capacity of nervous energy was overloaded. The symptoms included “irritability and peevishness; troubled sleep, bad headaches and poor appetite; a lack of concentration; an inability to plan for the future... morbid introspection eventually prevailed.” To survive, men were encouraged to develop their physicality to fend off the diseases. Similar symptoms presented themselves among the crew of the *Discovery*, perhaps except for poor appetite as the men were endlessly snacking in the cold climate. The overloading of nervous energy seems particularly relevant considering the extreme environment; as shown later, an excess of negative energy was released during the farcical play of *A Ticket-of-Leave*. Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 139.

In Antarctica, of course, the extremity of temperature was inverted. Anderson makes a convincing argument that American colonies in the Philippines were presented as a “special resource for white male self-fashioning and its testing ground,” and failure to develop this physical/moral force led to nervous, colonial meltdown in the crushing heat.⁸⁷ Considering the imperialistic sentiment driving Scott’s first expedition, the popular view of Antarctica as a similar site of restorative masculinity and the fixation with the heroic overcoming of bodily and mental disease, polar exploration can be drawn into the discourse on colonial medicines, power and the requisition of bodies to highlight how *cold* climates as well as tropical ones can produce hysteria over the degradation of white bodies. Furthermore, Antarctica’s lack of indigenous population meant that colonialists could not articulate their fear of the degradation of whiteness through the management of the hygiene of indigenous populations, which was frequently thought to be a cause of disease. Their absence only intensified inward gazes. Fitting neatly into the polar explorer’s penchant for harrowing introspection, this meltdown was a far more insular process. It centred the colonial man as site of degradation within a frozen landscape, leaving out commonly perceived influencing factors.

In sum, the way in which the *Discovery*’s efforts to stave off disruptive behaviours became riddled with erotic impulses critiques this very kind of body work as restoration and its role in nationalistic endeavour.⁸⁸ Historical analysis of

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 132.

⁸⁸ There are similarities in these accounts to Colin Johnson’s excellent study of homosociality in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), an enterprise begun for similar restorative purposes, where male physique and beauty became idealised and glamorised in the rural areas of America in the 1930s. The strenuous labour and athleticism that structured camps gave men “extraordinary license to disrobe.” *Just Queer Folks*, 152. Similar to journals from the CCC, the diaries of polar explorers were also “sufficiently suggestive to allow for reasonable speculation that enrollees themselves sensed something of the queer eroticism inherent in their homosocial world.” Colin Johnson, “Camp Life: The Queer History of ‘Manhood’ in the Civilian Conservation Corps,

the diary entries using a queer lens affords ample room for evaluation of sexual content. At the very least, this camp horseplay disrupts the popularised concepts of white, heroic manhood that polar explorers were both participating in and instrumental in constructing. The more the crew languished in an aura of healthy manliness to stave off the climate, the more they emphasised their own male sexuality. Viewed climatically therefore, it is possible to see environmental conditions such as low temperatures as arguably facilitating and encouraging queer behaviour. Or, to put it more broadly, temperature could become infused with the politics of gender, sexuality, race and nationalism.

“Lightly clad actors”

While environmental conditions helped pave the way for a homoerotic discourse centred on healthy manliness, resistance to the hegemonic repetitions of daily life were articulated through theatre. A production entitled *A Ticket-of-Leave* saw the cast and crew come together in an act of corporeal defiance – enjoying the experience of two men dangerously underdressed in women’s clothing – to challenge the climatic order. The addition of a young female character to the narrative also spoke to the homoerotic tensions that were barely repressible among the men, who had been isolated from the opposite sex for almost a year. Throughout, cross-dressing was a formidable palliative exercise that helped disperse negative psychic energy.

To stave off winter depression at a time when the near total darkness was affecting morale, a company, directed by Barne, put on a farce entitled *A Ticket-*

1933-1937,” *American Studies* 48:2 (2007): 30. Similarly, at YMCAs in nineteenth century America the “physical program heightened (homo)erotic tension by elevating the muscular physical form as an object of desire.” Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 157.

of-Leave on 25 June 1902 to the raucous amusement of the crew. The performance was an adapted version of the play by illustrator and dramatist Watts Phillips.⁸⁹ The sailors (and most likely officers too) anticipated the Royal Terror Theatre from early on in winter. Carpenter's Mate Duncan complained, "We have had nothing in the way of Amusement since 1st May so thing [sic] are very slack with our Officers. They were to work wonders during the Winter, but have not started yet & the Winter is nearly half gone."⁹⁰ Thankfully for Duncan, he and Barne spent weeks constructing a stage and scenery in the hut built onshore for storage purposes, transforming it into the Royal Terror Theatre.

The constant interplay between temperature and body was felt during the secretive rehearsals for *A Ticket-of-Leave*, when men willingly chose to expose themselves to physical harm for the sake of entertainment. As noted before in the Introduction, at the first rehearsal the actors fought debilitating cold temperatures. "Still blowing and temp. down to -30°F. I finished writing out the parts in *Ticket-of-Leave*, and after dinner the company assembled in the hut, where we all shivered for an hour, while I read the play and gave them their parts to learn."⁹¹ Nevertheless, the men, or "theatrical lambs" as Barne dubbed them, continued regardless, prepping stage and costumes over the next month with dogged determination.

On the evening of 25 June, the audience made their way over in a "rather keen wind and light snowdrift," with the temperature at -43°C. Like all aspects of winter life, the audience was segregated according to class, with officers seated on a row of chairs at the front and the rest of the crew on benches behind. Barne

⁸⁹ The play had a two-month run in the winter of 1862–63 at the Adelphi Theatre, London. Leane, "Antarctic Theatricals," 150.

⁹⁰ Duncan diary, 9 June 1902.

⁹¹ Barne diary, 28 May 1902.

and his troupe were backstage putting the finishing touches on their costumes: “Well, we got behind the scenes with most of the clothes, before the people came over to the hut, and then began a frightful pandemonium.” Barne’s description is a scene of mayhem, with two men pushing into frocks, adjusting wigs, others misplacing key props, the sickly anxiety of pre-performance hanging in the air:

I was in the middle with the make up box, and Buckridge, who was to get himself up as a lady, was at the end of the stage with Cross, Weller & someone else pushing & hauling him into his wig... then [Gilbert] Scott was being rigged as a housemaid, next to him, which caused great laughter. Pilbeam, leading seaman, suddenly discovered he had lost his coat & waistcoat, I was flying round the stage like sticking plaster on a pump handle, looking for them... I was rushing round with colours, putting first a dot on the boatswains nose & then one on Mrs Quiver’s face, plastery on hair & trying to do everything at the same time... as yet there was no sign of Allen, who had to be on the stage when the curtain went up.⁹²

These are not the sorts of scenes associated with heroic polar exploration. Instead, Barne’s amusing description of the frantic backstage preparation of his Royal Terror Theatre company exposes the heroic masculinity of the *Discovery*’s men as more multifaceted than commonly assumed. Scott and his crew were experimenting with their sexual personas despite the fact that they were complicit in the social construction of masculinity, their narratives becoming a means of mythologising an ideology of white, gendered heroism back home. The category of “hero,” a carefully constructed persona created through various contemporary and historiographical discourses, does not often taken within its remit the act of dressing up for the amusement of others; simply put, the muscular body of the heroic polar explorer does not belong in a dress. In order for figures to be kept within the lines of masculine heroism, therefore, it has been

⁹² Barne diary, 25 June 1902.

necessary to overlook certain elements of perceived femininity, to rationalise this cross-dressing within the confines of nineteenth-century normativity.

In reality, however, the company were as equally nervous about performing as they were about heading out into the snow and ice on dangerous sledging trips. By rematerialising themselves as women for the enjoyment of others, Horace Buckridge and Gilbert Scott willingly chose to reconstruct their gender to fill the gap left by excluding women, thereby critiquing the self-imposed gender exclusivity of their expedition – itself a product of the exclusion of women from the 1893 Royal Geographical Society ballot – and its heavily gendered, heroic ideology. Scott, Shackleton and Wilson, esteemed polar heroes, became complicit in this paradox when they enthusiastically cheered on the lady roles from their seats in the audience. Back home, the public waited for news of sensationalist achievements on the polar frontier. In Antarctica, there was a different kind of sensationalism happening on stage.

The somewhat complicated story of *A Ticket-of-Leave* centred on two ex-convicts returning to Britain from Australia, where they had spent seven years wrongly imprisoned. Wearing disguises, they infiltrate the house of distant relative Lavinia Quiver, played by laboratory assistant Horace Buckridge, and her nervous husband Aspen, who both fear attack from London criminals. With their real identities concealed, they try to ascertain objectively the family's feelings towards them. One of the convicts, however, posing as a butler, has evil intentions. The other falls in love with Mary Ann, an additional female character inserted into the original plot by Barne to serve as a long-lost love interest, played by Gilbert Scott, who bore no relation to the captain. From here on, farce ensues.

It was the inserted character of Mary Ann that was by far the most popular aspect of a show that was considered a roaring success, a “screaming comedy... When the representatives of the lady parts step on to the stage it is useless for them to attempt speech for several minutes, the audience is so hugely delighted.”⁹³ Praise for the female roles was unanimous: “It was a great success, the ladies – Scott and Buckridge – being especially good” and “It was very well done & the get-up was fine, particularly the ladies. [Gilbert] Scott made a very pretty slavey.” The plot was a little hard to work out for Robert Falcon Scott, but he wrote, “And so at last the curtain falls amidst vociferous cheering, and I for one have to acknowledge that I have rarely been so gorgeously entertained.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 261.

⁹⁴ Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 115; Hodgson diary, 25 June 1902, “slavey” referred to a female servant, especially a hardworking maid; Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 261.



Figure 2: The cast of *A Ticket-of-Leave*. Photograph by Reginald Skelton. Reproduced by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute. Front row, left to right: Horace Buckridge (Mrs Lavinia Quiver), Frank Wild (Mr Aspen Quiver) and Gilbert Scott (Mary Ann). Back row, left to right: Arthur Pilbeam (Joe), William Weller (Policeman), Jacob Cross (Policeman), Thomas Feather (Mr Thomas Nuggetts of Sidney) and David Allan (Bottles or “Shiny Samuel”).

After the performance, engineer Skelton took photos of the cast using flash technology. The only picture known to have survived showed the actors in costume sitting on stage in two rows. At the very top, the stage curtain intruded on the scene. It was evidently made from a hodgepodge of material; there were at least two separate sheets sown together. The wooden planks of the hut, frozen over in places, oscillated in tone from icy white to a dark grey. Hanging underneath, on the wall behind the actors, was a picture frame; next to it, what could be a faux door. If these were props, they show an enthusiastic effort on the part of the theatrical crew. Although the surroundings appear makeshift, claustrophobic and dark, there was a discernable spirit of aspiration in the little details of the set.

In the front row sat Horace Buckridge as Mrs Lavinia Quiver, Frank Wild as Mr Aspen Quiver and Gilbert Scott as Mary Ann. Buckridge and Scott's costumes were not half-hearted attempts at drag: Buckridge wore a white gown studded with stars. A dark belt around his waist tightened his frock and produced a considerable bosom – clearly also the product of some clever stuffing. In his hands was a handkerchief, held like a refined older lady with a nervous disposition. Buckridge was apparently wearing makeup: his cheeks seem rouged and pronounced. His facial expression is stern; his eyes are narrow and his mouth expressionless and tight. Perhaps he was a little embarrassed. To the right of Buckridge was Wild. Tellingly, he intruded on Buckridge's personal space. His right elbow almost rested on Buckridge's lap; his body leant in against his shoulder. This gives the impression that for the occasion of the photograph, Wild was once again willing to take up the role of husband to Buckridge's character.

To the right of Wild was Gilbert Scott as Mary Ann, who certainly looked the part of a pretty girl. His face, feminine in features and pose, appeared whiter and more pronounced than the others, most likely the product of Barne's formidable abilities in applying make-up. Scott's dress was a brilliant white, making his hands appear more swollen from frostbite. Nevertheless, he looked infinitely more feminine than Buckridge as the older Mrs Quiver. Both men must have been literally freezing in their costumes, with the temperature outside having rock-bottomed at -44°C the day before. While heavy in material, the dresses provided little comfort against the bone-chilling Antarctic weather. To the right of Gilbert Scott was boatswain Thomas Feather, who played her love interest, Nuggetts. His hand rested on Scott's shoulder attentively, and his body was turned so that he was standing over him like a protective husband. Together,

the pair looked like a believable couple, young and elegant. According to Captain Scott's account, "the inserted recognition scene between Nuggetts and Mary Ann was a highlight of the evening."⁹⁵ Based on the photo, it is easy to see why.

Although there is no record of why Barne decided to put on *A Ticket-of-Leave*, Elizabeth Leane has argued that there are parallels between the Antarctic explorer and that of a nineteenth-century convict, seeing similarities in experiences shared by the two. Many British convicts, before being transported to Australia, "were confined to the hull of a moored ship for months or years on end, in cold, damp and crowded conditions, with hard and occasionally dangerous labour providing their primary occupation." Conditions almost identical to those on the *Discovery*. Leane also finds parallels between the colours of polar spaces and prisons: differing shades of grey from white to black.⁹⁶ A look at the literature of polar exploration confirms that explorer-writers had a tendency to interpret the polar environment as a penal space: in Chapter 1, Elisha Kent Kane described Barlow's Inlet as a prison, a place of pain. Where men initially volunteered for expeditions to traverse and conquer new space, they soon came to view their environment as constricting, a confirmation of the coldness's ability to reduce a sense of spatiality. Scott himself used words such as "two years' imprisonment" and "long detention" to describe his stay in Antarctica.⁹⁷

However, the metaphors in *A Ticket-of-Leave* had a stronger focus on a return from imprisonment rather than the imprisonment itself. The characters of Nuggetts and Bottles, the two convicts, struggled to reintegrate themselves into

⁹⁵ Leane, "Antarctic Theatricals," 152.

⁹⁶ Leane, "Antarctic Theatricals," 153.

⁹⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 609.

British society after such a long period in exile, choosing to disguise in costume. There must have been an element of sympathy for these protagonists and their rematerialisations among audience and actors, who were vainly concerned with their bodies and visual appearance. When Skelton shaved off his beard and moustache, Lieutenant Charles Royds was significantly affected by the sight and anxious about his own appearance: "...for the whole day, every time I looked at him, I simply roared!! One forgets what people looked like, and I dread my possible looks when I take mine off!!"⁹⁸ Their return would require a level of personal transformation, perhaps the biggest rematerialisation of their personas in an expedition where men repeatedly enjoyed refashioning themselves on stage. They would forcibly have to readjust from life in an all-male fraternity that thrived on its sense of elitism, powerful bodies and sense of mission. In this sense, the play represented a rehearsal of return.⁹⁹

Scott began his detailed account of the night by mentioning that, "there are no heating arrangements other than the lamps," before dwelling on the effect of the low temperatures on the "lightly clad actors," two of whom were dangerously underdressed in women's clothing. By the end, however, he forgets the temperature and instead mentions, "vociferous cheering." Despite suffering from multiple frostbites, the audience became giddy with enjoyment, with Royds elaborating, "...then we made our way to the ship. I walked over with Wilson, and the men were singing out 'Cab Sir', 'ansome sir' 'Special edition' etc as full of fun as possible."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 144.

⁹⁹ Leane, "Antarctic Theatricals," 154.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 261; Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 144.

Where Victor Turner suggests that “certain entrenched features of a given society’s social structure influence both the course of conduct in observable social events and the scenarios of its genres of cultural performance,” this logic can be expanded to include climatic environment, so that heavily prohibitive features such as the low temperature can be regarded as fundamental to the structure of all aspects of social activity, including theatre.¹⁰¹ The oppressive climate regulated the daily interaction of the crew, but it is possible to view farcical cross-dressing as a loaded disruption or challenge to this order. By exposing themselves to sub-zero temperatures in women’s clothing, the actors and audience participated in the explicit performance of able-bodiedness as a form of social protest, breaking the repetitions of daily life that maintained the hegemony of climate. In other words, Barne’s cold “theatrical lambs” invited the rest of the crew to witness two men in drag as deviant symbols that temporarily subverted environmental dominance. Playing on the way home by reimagining the path from hut to boat as a busy British street, the audience continued, mobilised, down a road of resistance created by the performance.

It was visual humour that was utilised in the cathartic protest against the environmental hegemony, providing a sanctioned expenditure of pent-up frustration that could not be readily expressed during an expedition that ran on formal naval lines and practised strict class segregation between officer and scientist, and crew. In *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the popular part of the show was the raciness of Buckridge and Gilbert Scott as women, the visual transfiguration being articulated most in written accounts: “...the disguises are excellent, and it soon becomes evident that the actors have regarded them as by far the most

¹⁰¹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 62.

important part of the proceedings.” Among others, Royds’ description of the actors helps chart the corporeal change of company member to character, his descriptions providing vivid detail of their bodily metamorphoses: “Scott was a really awfully pretty servant girl, and took one of the ‘thinking parts’. Mrs Buckridge being the lady of the house, and was decidedly big and fat, in fact he looked huge.”¹⁰² The attention to the obesity of Mrs Buckridge betrays the idealisation of certain type of able-bodiedness on stage: her plump, healthy, stereotyped size must have appealed in the crew’s compromised state. Her projection as a motherly figure suggests that the cast and audience enjoyed witnessing a feminine and domestic-orientated physical representation of the self, an unconscious yearning for the home.

Campness can be regarded as a means of finding strength and humour in weakness and tragedy, in the process dethroning the serious to provide an experience of under-involvement.¹⁰³ Certainly, the campy performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave* detached the men from their difficult predicament and provided enjoyment at the expense of the serious. The attention given to the artifice and exaggeration of the female roles was particularly telling, in that it highlighted an especially pronounced engagement with surface-level change in lieu of the more threatening, deeper changes being experienced by the actors and audience. What is intriguing is that campness, a non-normative behaviour that has been historically relegated as undesirable in the context of hegemonic masculinities, was nevertheless functionally important to the psychological well-being of the crew. Viewed another way, it can be regarded as complicit in the maintenance of

¹⁰² Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 144.

¹⁰³ Johnson, “Camp Life,” 25; Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 62–63.

imperialist activity, however paradoxical its relationship to masculine, nationalistic activity it may seem.

As discussed throughout, the climate caused men to feel frustrated, creating new structures of subjectivity. Assuming that there was a level of anger not readily expressible among all ranks of men, and that the suppression of anger requires a significant level of psychic energy, the feeling of immense pleasure at the end of the performance, the “vociferous cheering,” as Scott called it, was a liberation of inhibiting energy, giving the crew much-needed room to allocate their energies elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ But, part of the psychic liberation felt here was also a release from a suppression of sexual impulses.

While it is not possible to evidence definitively sexual intercourse among the crew, it is nevertheless a useful exercise to consider the potential of its occurrence in terms of climatic pressure. Leane’s arguments regarding the prison/polar narrative, outlined earlier, ignore the intensely homosocial aspect of jails, known for their high incidence of homosexual activity. Like prisons, the conditions of the *Discovery* boat imposed rigid rules that drew gendered, male bodies together: limited living space, hard, physical labour, an impassable environment “wall” and no possibility of escape. This framework could have provided the basis for homosexual contact. It certainly resulted in a discernable level of homoeroticism: the physical culture on board at once suggests a proto-sexual appreciation of male form.

Barry Burg, in his discussion of the incidence of sodomy amongst seventeenth-century buccaneer society, employs modern-day statistics from penal spaces to discuss with caution the level of tenability for homosexual

¹⁰⁴ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 321.

contact among buccaneers. He draws parallels between buccaneer society and penal spaces by emphasising how homosexual contact is hinged on rigidly applied rules from an outside force, underscoring that the negation of these rules would disperse any situational same-sex contact: “Homosexual contact behind bars exists only within a framework of rigidly applied rules and stipulations imposed from beyond the ranks of inmates.”¹⁰⁵

Burg’s quantitative approach is a useful exercise with limits. In the case of the *Discovery*, using this methodology, there is sufficient room to argue the likelihood of genital-to-genital contact. Burg’s suggestions here are bolstered by the added significance of the penal-polar metaphor, a tighter duality than that of penal-pirate. The journals of the crew allow for reasonable speculation. For example, there were numerous occurrences when men shared sleeping bags when not out on sledging trips, once after drinking.¹⁰⁶ While further details do not exist, taking a speculative approach to these instances of physical intimacy provides a critique of theories of sexuality by showing how (possible) same-sex contact can be facilitated by climactic factors to become a situational phenomenon rather than an innate disposition in individuals. In other words: scared, cold and alone, it is not unfathomable to imagine two polar explorers sharing intimate moments as a response to an outside threat.

Of all the indicators, Mary Ann’s addition to *A Ticket-of-Leave* is one of the firmest pieces of evidence of the barely suppressed sexuality of the explorers. Her addition to the narrative suggests that Barne anticipated her popularity as the crew had not seen women for nearly a year and would not do so for another three. The fact that Mary Ann was a common euphemism for a woman-like man,

¹⁰⁵ Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 226.

a sodomite or a prostitute in nineteenth-century Britain suggests that Barne had a tongue-in-cheek appreciation for the queer implications of his plot alteration.

Unfortunately, but perhaps not coincidentally, Gilbert Scott did not mention his cross-dressing in his diary, only reticently writing, “I took a part.”¹⁰⁷ Buckridge kept no written record of the expedition. There is also no mention as to why either was given their roles. In womanless weddings in rural America, the role of bride was often given to men who were “burly and unshaven... overly and overtly masculine.”¹⁰⁸ Doing so portrayed blatant gender inversion and the opportunity to ridicule those in drag, usually important local figures who normally held authority. In the case of *Discovery*, transformations were not obscene but wonderfully successful, as evidenced in the photo discussed above. Buckridge’s portrayal of Lavinia Quiver, an older, nervous, plump woman, was well met, with Royds noting in his journal that Buckridge looked positively huge in his outfit. Gilbert Scott became a believable female too, though his character was created to excite the men. Unlike womanless weddings, the company was not offering a critique of existing power structures or the sentimentality of marriage. And unlike drag queens later in the twentieth century, who portray *ambiguity* in their identities to raise questions about the nature of gender categories, the cross-dressers in *A Ticket-of-Leave* were inviting the audience to contemplate their convincing rematerialisation.¹⁰⁹ It is possible, therefore, that Gilbert Scott was chosen for his ability to pass successfully as an attractive woman. For the betterment of the crew, he voluntarily appropriated a female form – exposing himself to dangerous temperatures and their entailing frostbites

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert Scott diary, 24 June 1902 [incorrect dating, the performance was held on 25 June], MS 1485;D, Scott Polar Research Institute.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Rupp and Taylor, *Drag Queens*, 215.

– to offer his crewmates a temporary engagement with the opposite sex in an otherwise all-male situation. This outpouring of sexual desire was safely within the parameters of the sanctioned space of theatre, where liberation of sexuality and the psychic energy needed to inhibit it could pass without eliciting aggression or punishment.

The naming of Mary Ann, however, a pseudonym for an effeminate man, could have acted as a subtle political message too: if crewmen involved themselves in same-sex relations, they too could be publically labelled a “Mary Ann.” This suggests that there was at least a fear of non-normative sex on board, indicating that polar expedition society, in its heroic, masculined nature, could foster homoerotic impulses. Was her addition to the plot then a method of asserting control by suggesting that ridicule would follow any deviations from sexual behaviour?¹¹⁰

More than a subtle political message, Mary Ann also allowed the crew to confirm publicly its heterosexuality (this necessity being possible evidence of an actual threat of homosexuality), in that their shared appreciation of Mary Ann reinforced a sense of sexual normativity. As historian Alan Bérubé notes in his study of homosexuality in World War Two, “military officials used soldier shows and drag routines... to boost soldier morale by allowing soldiers without women to entertain each other and affirm their heterosexuality.” While the spectre of the homosexual man was not an explicit concern during this expedition, at least not as written in published journals, the whooping, cheering

¹¹⁰ Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*, 38. Her role was possibly also indicative of how the crew anticipated the behaviour of (their) women at home: faithful, longing, and all too willing to jump into the hands of their returned men. In other words, Mary Ann’s sexuality was thoroughly tame and dependent on male presence, reflecting both nineteenth-century sensibilities and a safeguard: had Mary Ann’s character been too licentious, had she lived up to the connotation of prostitution that came with her name on stage, it is possible the performance would have proved offensive.

and objectification of the “really awfully pretty servant girl” confirms that Gilbert Scott’s transformation was highly convincing, making public appreciation of her safe. A lesser rematerialisation, or one that might have exposed more effeminate behaviour on the part of Gilbert Scott, may have procured a level of aggression similar to the World War Two soldiers, who disliked it when an actor undermined heterosexual assumptions by playing overtly camp.¹¹¹

Later expeditions to polar spaces would trade physical items of use for Inuit women to provide sexual liaisons: Robert Peary sanctioned Inuit mistresses and left behind offspring.¹¹² Peary saw the presence of women as essential to men’s physical and mental health, justifying his almost chattel-like acquisition and allotment of Inuit women as necessary to uphold the ideal manhood he required of his men.¹¹³ Here, the fear of non-normative sexual relations, a kind of colonial degradation, was a driving force behind the colonial acquisition of indigenous populations, who were used instrumentally to provide sexual relief for the betterment of the expedition. During the *Discovery* Expedition, no such colonial luxury could be afforded due to a lack of an indigenous population. The crew were forced to turn inward for sexual contentment, constructing the character of Mary Ann instead, suggesting that in one of most hyper-masculine spaces, gender roles were in fact sufficiently incoherent to allow sexual personas to be temporarily constructed and performed at will.

¹¹¹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 68, 72.

¹¹² Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 35.

¹¹³ Dick, *Muskox Land*, 382.

Conclusion

Both body work and cross-dressing were products of the freezing conditions of Antarctica, which regulated the bodies and minds of officers, scientists and sailors on a daily basis. I have argued that examining temperature's role in affecting the intimate allows for new understandings of social relations, thereby adding cold climate to a postcolonial discourse that has primarily focused on the effects of excessive heat to those who usually exist in "normative," cooler temperatures.

These distressingly low temperatures produced a standard for the body of the polar explorer: it was continually compromised, a threatened subject of a dominating environment that paid no heed to class or gender. In this context, the men performed able-bodiedness, liberating themselves from their regime of cold anxiety by building muscle. Behind this kind of social activity was an effort to fend off any depression or colonial malaise, which were thought to lead to ill behaviour or vice – even of a sexual nature.

Paradoxically, however, the crew's efforts to ward off any non-normative behaviour began to betray their own homoeroticism. The competitive monthly weigh-ins exposed the crew's increasing fascination with male physique, while the addition of Mary Ann suggested a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the queer nature of their all-male society. In the process, these sexualised responses to the climate interrogated the heavily imperialistic nature of polar exploration, a celebrated activity that was complicit in the social construction of manhood. Understanding the differing and occasionally queer responses to Antarctic

environment by heroic men, therefore, opens up new questions regarding the relationship between man and nature.

Chapter 4

Black Ice: The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe, plantation songs and the stuff of farce and force

One night during the deep, dark polar winter of 1902, something bizarre was afoot in Antarctica. Lieutenant Charles Royds of the *Discovery* Expedition made his way through the heavy snow and biting wind to reach the inadequate shelter of the flimsy hut built on shore for storage purposes. Though it may have been pitch black outside, something altogether “darker” was happening inside. Assembling his choir, Royds wrote in his diary: “Went over to the hut at 7.0[0 p.m.] and painted the faces and lips.”¹ Wigs were pushed on, buttons fastened, ties straightened. Half an hour later, the rest of the crew were doing their best to reach the hut in the storm. Arriving, the audience sat down, hurting with frozen fingers and noses. The curtain was ceremoniously rolled up and frostbitten faces were quickly forgotten as the crew looked on at a different kind of face, the blackface, which provided a night of riotous laughter despite the macabre conditions outside.

After the successes of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the crew of the *Discovery* Expedition had decided to put on one more performance at the Royal Terror Theatre that winter to mark the one-year anniversary of their departure from British shores. Organised by Lieutenant Royds, 12 seamen from the mess deck became the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe on 6 August 1902. Telling half-wit jokes and singing well-known minstrel songs in costume, with stage names such as Jim

¹ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds*, 156.

Kroo, Stumps and Bones, the men and their show were a huge success among the audience and actors. This chapter argues that in one of the whitest spaces possible, the black mask was put on to air a complex constellation of white, colonial grievances and aspirations. On the one hand, the actors and audience enjoyed the hysterical immaturity and malapropism of the minstrel performance as a rare moment of reprieve from their debilitating physical and social environment. On the other hand, this catharsis was achieved through grotesque racial mimicry, despite (or perhaps due to) the presumptive racial exclusivity of the expedition and the mapping of this sentiment onto Antarctic space. In its paradoxical, analogic representations of suffering slaves, therefore, the performance can be read as a vivid articulation of the race and class hierarchies on which British polar expeditions were founded.

As the curtain rolled up, the costly effort put into the show became immediately apparent. Though the minstrels were only on stage for a few hours that stormy night, their performance had taken weeks to prepare: the cast constructed costumes from mundane objects and attended nightly rehearsals after dinner during a month of ferocious weather. Spending extended time on this kind of play appropriated both energy and resources from the on-going production of hegemonic narratives of courage and endurance. Where men were expected to risk life and limb in the pursuit of country and science, they instead suffered for the sake of farce.

Uncomfortably, this farcical clowning of the minstrel show, based on a grotesque misrepresentation of black culture derived from the antebellum and postbellum American South and colonial Africa, offered a much-needed world of laughter diametrically opposed to the official and the mundane. But more than

this, the liminality produced by costuming as black figures in Antarctica allowed the lower-class sailors, many of whom had dressed up before for the expedition's previous theatricals and two of whom would be sent home early on a relief ship, to act out their rebellious impulses in an emotionally restrictive society with entrenched classed and gendered expectations. The lowbrow conundrums of the night, which were ostensibly silly word plays or jokes about smells, actually helped the mess deck air grievances at officers and environment. No one was spared of ridicule, not even Captain Scott, who was the butt of one of the jokes – a subject of great consternation among the officers detailing the night in their diary entries.

This inversion of mundane reality to grotesque surrealism was also found in the fantastical staging of the production: the cast's ridiculous, homemade costumes and the giant, imposing black male caricature painted on the stage backdrop created another world, but one that tacitly reflected the absurdities of life in the Antarctic, which was full of preposterous and near-hallucinogenic experiences produced by the landscape and light. In all, the immature nature of the conundrums, the hysterical malapropism and the grotesque representation of black consciousness can be seen as infantilising or dehumanising strategies: they safely arrested or contained black culture while granting the men a welcome retreat from the expedition's responsibilities that necessitated a very adult kind of "manhood." As such, perverse racial play was a cathartic activity, a means of emancipation for both actors and audiences from the emotional and physical suffering endured as part of colonial activity. This added element of psychosocial recuperation suggests that racial mimicry, highly prejudicial and grotesquely enacted, could be used for restorative benefits despite, or perhaps because of, the

low standing of those whom this mimicry sought to naturalise and essentialise as childish or subhuman.

Though the minstrels had the audience in fits of laughter, there was, as Eric Lott puts it in his analysis of plantation songs, “a gaping sore at the heart of all this cheer.”² In a perverse polar-plantation analogy, the 12 seamen mobilised songs about slaves as a figurative language to describe the difficult world around them, though all the while maintaining the imperialist hierarchies that stymied the freedom and equality of racially defined Others. In winter, many of the cast were burdened with some of the most mundane tasks of polar “exploration”: digging snow, stoking fires and cooking. Wholly crucial, these grinding chores went mostly unrecognised in official accounts and celebratory historiographies, which pay undue attention to the plight of the upper-class officers and their “heroic” pursuit of scientific enquiry and territorial expansion. I argue that the cast felt some paradoxical sense of affiliation with black slave counterparts, however perverse this analogy now reads.

The songs performed by the Dishcover Minstrels Troupe also revealed the anxieties in the collective subconscious of the expedition concerning death and glory, classic themes in Stephen Foster’s minstrel songs adapted to the context of the brutal Antarctic environment. Lyrics that depicted slaves gaining entry into heaven spoke to their fears about death and returning to “civilisation” from their masculine collective, and whether they would be glorified for their hard work. I argue that the faithful slave narratives of the American South were transnational in their influence; the cast rendered the slave as a noble suffering fellow, sanitising much of his past and stressing his alleged devotion to a greater

² Lott, *Love & Theft*, 187.

cause – a distorted mirroring of their own under-recognised commitment to the expedition. Finally, the songs chosen that night also allowed the men to release homoerotic tension, a well-demonstrated aspect of minstrelsy.

There were multiple imperial discourses at play around Antarctic minstrels. Some of the crew chose to clown as a white representation of the tatterdemalion and primitive black figure to reaffirm ailing colonial mastery over racially defined Others during an imperialist endeavour that could not run on the actual subjugation of the Other due to Antarctica's lack of indigenous population. In doing so, I argue they were also masking their own complicity in the imperial process by nostalgically representing the black figure as in need of paternalist care even as they ridiculed him. The performance of the minstrel show effectively "colours" Antarctic history, which is seen as cultureless as much as it is considered the domain of literal and figurative whiteness. The performance of blackface represented a more radical definition of the frontier acted out through drama, one with the potential to critique hegemonic views perpetuated by those private and national benefactors with vested interests back home.

In analysing the performance I seek to reinforce my arguments of the previous chapter concerning the extreme polar environment and bodies. The pervasive presence of idiosyncratic polar illnesses such as frostbite ensured that the men suffered from a constant, anxiety-ridden obsession over the well-being of their mind and body. This fear, however, elevated the male form into an object worthy of sexual admiration as men lifted weights and looked to one another's bodies to understand how the environment was slowly degrading their flesh and bone. Similar to *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the minstrel show also was shaped by these

social, polar processes, in that the men rematerialised their corporeal selves in order to reclaim a sense of agency from the dominating environment. I suggest that white fantasies about the supposedly virile nature of the black body and “naive” black humour turned this performance of blackface into a complex, colonial expression of resistance against the extreme climate. By taking on distorted black forms, the cast was misguidedly aspiring to a phallic, regenerative maleness not dissimilar to the kind put forward by the Father Neptune episode a year earlier, one also punctuated by a sense of abandon and gaiety.

Finally, I suggest that the Dishcover Minstrels were not a freak alteration of a long-standing performance tradition but a significant addition to the overall canon. Though scholars have convincingly shown that minstrelsy spoke to the social patterns of the society in which it was performed, I consider how it shaped and was shaped by the experiences of men in a space outside of any simplistic notion of territory. Similar to Chapter 2, my analysis here speaks to and interrogates hegemonic, metropolitan forms of blackface.

Broadly speaking, I argue, therefore, that Antarctic minstrels represented a complex set of racial and imperial paradoxes played out on stage. On a continent devoid of indigenous population, white men nevertheless performed perverse racial farce to reaffirm racial stratification, exposing the ever-tenuous foundations on which notions of white supremacy and grandeur were built. Out of the performance of the Dishcover Minstrel show, the pervasive narrative of the happy-go-lucky, tatterdemalion slave, sanitised of his past by those seeking to expunge their own agency in the history of slavery, found its way to Antarctic shores. In the often absurd, mind-bending milieu, this kind of subversion of reality was all too fitting.

“Everyone had some sly shaft of wit aimed at him”

The crew had planned to put on a full programme of entertainment at the Royal Terror Theatre during the darkest months of 1902. However, after the sterling success of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the theatre failed to stage frequent performances, “owing to the work of several of its members and other circumstances.”³ Finally, Lieutenant Charles Royds, the man behind the piano during the *Discovery* Expedition, took it upon himself to organise a “nigger minstrel troupe” to mark the one-year anniversary of departure from British shores on 6 August. Royds formed a choir of 12 men from the mess deck: two Royal Navy petty officers, six Royal Navy seamen, two Royal navy stokers, a Merchant Navy carpenter’s mate and the civilian ship’s cook – all considered to belong to what Scott called, in generalising, classed terms, “the men.” They rehearsed in secret for a month in some of the most distressingly low temperatures of their three-year stay in Antarctica.

The troupe battled frequent storms that raged outside to reach the hut after dinner in July, where they practised their singing despite the howling and bone-chilling wind. Temperatures of -40°C could not curb Royds’ enthusiasm; he was already drawing up plans for the night a month in advance on 6 July and handed out roles in the hut a week later. On the 16th, after a particularly successful rehearsal, he seemed confident in his performers’ abilities: “Very good indeed, and I do really think that some of the songs will be really well

³ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 261.

sung.”⁴ Royds took the musical component of the show seriously: over the course of the week, he rehearsed with the basses, tenors and altos individually before practising with the cornermen, devoting entire days to arranging aspects of the performance.⁵

At the same time, Carpenter’s Mate James Duncan began making props of bones for the troupe to clang as they joked and belted out tunes, suggesting prevailing stereotypes of regressive Africans given to cannibalism. Africa, though in many ways the antithesis of Antarctica in terms of climate and culture, was another continent tainted by the work of the Royal Geographical Society. Before polar exploration took centre stage among the society’s upper echelons and its many supporters, Africa played host to myriad white, colonial men keen to make a name for themselves through intrepid exploration. In fact, their experiences largely influenced the society’s approach towards mapping Antarctica.⁶ Scott himself had served in his early days as a torpedo officer in South Africa, a place where the *Discovery* Expedition had stopped the previous summer when Seaman John Mardon was dismissed for getting riotously drunk in the Father Neptune ritual. These experiences and the society’s attitudes towards “unmapped” space on the hotter continent were undoubtedly influential to the *Discovery*, providing a disturbing backdrop to the systemic traversing and charting of pristine, polar space as well as the expedition’s racist amusements.

The resolution of the cast was soon tested by the weather. The path to the hut became increasingly hard to make out in the drift, the usual markers buried under heaps of snow. The hut became “awfully” cold. Royds complained: “Have

⁴ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 201.

⁵ A cornerman was the minstrel at the end of the semicircle on stage who would carry on the dialogue with the interlocutor, the middle man, who acts as an announcer and instigator.

⁶ Larson, *An Empire of Ice*, 62.

got a nasty attack of rheumatism in my left wrist... It hurt like blazes playing the piano.” But his spirits could not be dampened, the ridiculousness of the endeavour lending him some cheery warmth: “I simply laughed all the time, and what with that and the foolishness of some of the men performing I simply yelled with laughter and couldn’t get on with the work.”⁷ That work presumably included the regular retuning of the piano under such climatic conditions, putting the heavy instrument back into the service of racist caricature.

However, in the following days, even Royds’ yelling was quietened by the roaring storms outside, the inevitable onslaught of low temperatures providing some drama of its own. “After dinner went across to the hut for a practice, but it was hard work getting there, as the leading or guiding ropes have become hidden under the snow. Awfully cold in the hut, and my fingers were nearly frost-bitten whilst playing the piano.”⁸ Duncan declared the drift and wind too much for him to make it over to rehearsal. That night, the return journey was particularly arduous, with a few of the would-be minstrels losing their way in the wall of white snow. Men risked their well-being, trudging through the blinding snowfall to perform farce, thereby muddying the air of serious, heroic sensibility surrounding their expedition: Royds came back frostbitten on four fingers and a thumb, while Leading Seaman Arthur Pilbeam had frostbite on his nose.

With temperatures hitting rock bottom, Royds became ill, unable to sleep and suffering from a “devilish” sore throat. He was originally to appear in the show itself; on the programme of the evening, shown below, Royds was scheduled for a solo performance of “De Old Umbrella.” Due to his worsening sickness, he decided to remain offstage but behind the piano. If Royds had

⁷ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 153.

⁸ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 154.

blackened-up, it would have significantly departed from the practice on board that officers and scientists stay seated in the audience, a practice itself that was not congruent with earlier polar exploration when officers took leading roles, as discussed in Chapter 1. If Carpenter's Mate Duncan – presumably stronger – would not risk his health for rehearsals, then Royd's life-endangering determination suggests officers now not only organised but also were the driving force behind farce. Both second-in-command Albert Armitage and biologist Thomas Hodgson noted in their diaries that it was "unfortunate" that "poor" Royds was too unwell to take part.⁹

With Royds bed-ridden in the first few days of August and missing rehearsals on the 4th, Lieutenant Michael Barne, director of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, began work on the stage in the hut while Duncan laid out chairs. Barne spent days excitedly painting the drop scene: "It promises to be a good show. I have done a huge nigger's head supposed to be stuck through the curtain."¹⁰ The backdrop to the stage warrants attention, the giant head anticipating the racially contentious nature of the performance before it had even begun. It augmented this Antarctic stage with a dream-like quality of otherworldly surrealism. So too did it speak to the white, colonial sentiment powering the expedition: the image of the black face, peering through the curtain, can be thought of as mirroring the exclusion of racially defined Others in Antarctica during explorative enterprises. The painted black face looked on at the activity of white men with curiosity but without permission, having to peer out from behind a curtain, an object that demarcates spatial boundaries and limits visibility.

⁹ Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 119; Hodgson diary, 6 August 1902.

¹⁰ Barne diary, 4 August 1902.

A programme was mimeographed for the evening; it showed two caricatured minstrels on the cover, with huge spotted bowties, bright colours and thick, exaggerated lips. One, wearing a small top hat, introduced the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe. Inside, the programme listed the songs and their performers, in the manner of the table below.¹¹

Opening Chorus	The Troupe	Marching through Georgia
Solo	Williamson (George)	Poor Old George
Solo	Page (Bones)	Uncle Ned
Solo	Croucher (Snow Ball)	Golden Slippers
General Chorus	The Troupe	Cock Robin
Solo	Wild (Stumps)	Old Kentucky Home
Solo	Handsley (Squash)	Camptown Races
Solo	Plumley (Cinders)	Who's d'at Calling?
Solo	Kennar (Skins)	The Old Log Cabin
Solo	Allan (Jim Kroo)	I Can't Think of Nuthing Else
General Chorus	The Troupe	John Brown's Body
Solo	Duncan (Tom Sawdust)	Swanee River
Solo	Clarke (Dough Boy)	Kingdom Coming
Solo	Lt. Royds (ill)	De Old Umbrella

¹¹ Barne diary, 6 August 1902. The majority of names were typical minstrel character names, ranging from the common Sambo, a stereotypical slave name dating from before the nineteenth century, to Jim Kroo, a play on Jim Crow, to the obscure: Dough Boy, a term for an American soldier in use around the 1840s. The name Bones reflected the castanet made from bones and used as a percussion instrument, and Tom Sawdust was surely a play on Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain's character from various novels.

Solo	Heald (Birdie)	Good Old Jeff
Solo	Pilbeam (Sambo)	Louisiana Law
Final Chorus	The Troupe	Good Night

The song list alone suggests the need to place the chosen music. The states mentioned above were mainly Confederate: Georgia, Louisiana, Florida (where Swanee River is the state song), and Kentucky, which was claimed by the Confederacy. Only one northern state is referenced, Pennsylvania, where the Camptown racetrack was located. This suggests, as will be discussed in more detail, that the show had a particular fixation with the American South.

At the bottom of the list of songs were the words “GOD SAVE THE KING,” a seemingly innocuous phrase that can be interpreted at least three ways. Firstly, it existed as an imperial rally and ringing endorsement of the colonial traversing of Antarctic space. The decision to include this phrase on the programme, a long standing tradition in polar theatre, underscored, “the connection between the ship at the limits of the world and the monarch at its centre.”¹² Secondly, it betrayed an official acceptance of, or ambivalence towards, racial subjugation specific to the antebellum and postbellum United States as reflected in the song list presented above. Finally, it would have served to remind the actors (and some audience members) of the overall higher authorities to which they reported, reinforcing social hierarchies both shipboard and national in its sanction of fun. As such, the bill exposed the officers’ assumption that the theatre could promote order and discipline, even as it became a site of resistance.

¹² Elce, ““One of the bright objects,”” 356.

On the day of the 6th, there was some consternation over the state of the weather, which by now had “poorly” and “very dicky” Royds firmly under its chilly spell. Barne’s face had taken a full hour to thaw after being outside earlier in the day. Despite the cold snap, the Captain and others decided to go ahead with the programme as intended, though the strong wind did not help proceedings. Scott noted that every crewmember working his way through the storm to the hut did “his best to make a record in reaching it.” Inside, the situation was little better, with the temperatures well below zero despite a coal fire, its use restricted during the expedition to keep coal stocks at an adequate level. “I wonder how the ordinary theatre-goer would appreciate sitting in stalls under such conditions,” Scott wrote.¹³ Indeed, both audience and actors were performing that wintery evening, the men in the seats having to recreate the grandeur of a theatre back home despite the adverse conditions and the unavoidable reality that they were, in fact, seated in a flimsy hut constructed on the shores of the coldest continent on earth.

The minstrels had spent the day busily readying themselves for their performance, rummaging through the *Discovery* for trousers and slippers and then putting their final touches on costumes. There was a huge rush at 6.30 p.m. to finish up transformations, with Duncan writing, “all the Sambos are busy Blacking those Faces & hands + dressing.”¹⁴ Royds went over half an hour later and “painted the faces and lips.”¹⁵ Finally, the troupe rolled up the curtain to reveal 12 blacked-up polar explorers underneath it. Hodgson noted he could only recognise around three of the 12 minstrels before they spoke, their voices being

¹³ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 262.

¹⁴ Duncan diary, 6 August 1902.

¹⁵ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 156.

the only betrayal of their disguises.¹⁶ One only need look at Scott's description of the done-up minstrels to understand the extent to which they underwent bodily rematerialisations:

One was not sorry when the curtain rolled up and disclosed our twelve minstrels with blackened faces sitting in a row with "Massa Johnson" in the centre... There is no doubt the sailors dearly love to make up; on this occasion they had taken an infinity of trouble to prepare themselves; calicoes of all sorts had been cut up and sewn together to make suits of the most vivid colours and grotesque form; shirt fronts and enormous collars of elaborate design had been made from paper; wigs had been manufactured from tow, in some cases dipped in red ink, and an equal ingenuity had been displayed in producing the enormous boots and buttons which constitute an important part of the nigger minstrel's costume. "Bones" and "Skins" had even gone so far as to provide themselves with movable top-knots which could be worked at effective moments by pulling a string below.¹⁷

Unlike the performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the costumes and props of the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe were conceptualised and constructed during the icy winter. The reappropriation and reconstruction of materials designated for imperial endeavours problematises the expensive materiality upon which the expedition was able to run, a resource pool generously donated from public and private benefactors with vested interests in the outcome of the expedition. It suggests that recreational activity could feed off the same finite sum of resources, imbuing objects with more explicitly racist sentiment and making them tools of perverse play, objects and materials that could have been desperately needed had the expedition taken a turn for the worse. Here, the stuff of imperial force was transformed and trivialised into the stuff of farce, but later on these props would be reappropriated back into the imperial fold of the expedition's resources,

¹⁶ Hodgson diary, 6 August 1902.

¹⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 262.

creating a cyclical relationship between farce and force. It would result in startling visual markers of racist ideologies punctuating the landscape as the men went about their mundane tasks.

When Captain Scott looked on at the minstrels for the first time, he was looking at a production that had been in the making for many weeks. As the men rummaged for, reconceptualised and rebuilt items during the course of winter, they began to play weeks before any drama was due on stage. The bizarre, otherworldly nature of the minstrel production and its preparations, from the painting of the large black face to the preparing of fake bones, helped disrupt the monotony of daily reality, turning the hierarchical, serious, imperialistic polar endeavour into (at least, on its surface) a hysterical, laughing matter – a much-needed outcome that winter. This vivid inversion culminated on the night with the clowning of the minstrel performance. From silly costumes to tomfoolery, the clown's well-noted ability to subvert seriousness and to warp the sense of self gave the men release from their usual "civilised" behaviour and self-discipline, this civilising endeavour, of course, being about the appropriation of land and its resources.¹⁸

Furthermore, there was something in the landscape of Antarctica, in particular the ice formations found on land and sea, which sat behind the show as a fitting backdrop. Gazing at towering, twisting icebergs and ice formations often produced descriptions in the men's diaries that seemed to be the product of hallucinogens or spiritual encounters. Surgeon and zoologist Edward Wilson noted in his diary the "brilliant and sparkling" spicules of ice that made mists in front of the men's eyes; the icebergs produced "the most beautiful effects of light

¹⁸ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy*, 140.

and shade and mystery.”¹⁹ Indeed, the ice, “pure blue, cobalt and pale emerald green,” would often trick and trip up the men; on one occasion Wilson, Barne and Hodgson raced off after a flock of penguins only to discover it had been a ghostly mirage.²⁰ Elsewhere, a near-total absence of daylight for three months, temperatures far below freezing point that warped flesh and metal, frequent and furious snowfalls and a lingering, almost hysterical impulse to keep oneself above winter depression all served to confound reality further. Wilson adequately summed up the surrealism of everyday life when he wrote: “Royds was reading the anemometer on the screen in the afternoon and was simply blown off the ladder. Bernacchi had to go to his magnetic hut and did most of the journey on hands and knees. These things sound funny, but it is no exaggeration to say that ten yards from the ship you may be as completely lost as ten miles.”²¹ The figure of the minstrel clown sat centre stage in this mind-bending milieu with “his suits of the most vivid colours and grotesque form”; he was a personification of Antarctic absurdity and a fitting celebration of everything that seemed ludicrous about daily reality.

Lieutenant Reginald Skelton took a flashlight photo of the troupe that night; the extant record is a troubling, complex image, one of the most vivid expositions of the racist, imperialistic hierarchies of early-twentieth-century polar exploration. Twelve blacked-up crewmembers sat in the traditional British minstrelsy format of a semi-circle, each beyond recognition to the audience and in grossly exaggerated costumes, in front of footlights.²² The photo makes

¹⁹ Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition*, 108.

²⁰ Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition*, 74, 131.

²¹ Wilson, *Diary of the 'Discovery' Expedition*, 163.

²² The semi-circle was supposed to encourage musical and comedic exchange between the minstrels, who faced each other and improvised, and the audience, who completed the other half of the circle and felt included in the performance.

evident the extent to which faces and skins were heavily darkened and costumes thoughtfully constructed. Most of the men wore wigs made from frayed rope to complete their metamorphoses into ludicrously caricatured black figures. Some of the minstrels held items such as pipes in their darkened hands, which may help explain the smoky atmosphere that obscured part of the photo. There were at least two tambourines in the troupe; it is not known whether the men brought them from Britain or whether they were constructed from local materials. If they were, it is likely that they were covered with seal skins, signalling that a part of previously untouched Antarctic materiality was used in the production of objects of racial prejudice, seal skins in the service of degrading human skin colours and racial phenotypes.

At the top right of the image, the rolled up curtain was just visible. On it, towards the right, was the scrunched-up logo of the Royal Geographical Society, the co-organiser of the expedition and a learned society that was, in reality, an official arm of colonial expansion simultaneously vested in colonial Africa. The imagery here is heavily ironic: underneath the banner of British colonialism stood 12 men committed to its cause, yet conspicuously blacked-up as the very people that the project of imperialism sought to delegitimise through colonial subjugation and racial hierarchisation.



Figure 3: The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe on 6 August 1902. Photograph by Reginald Skelton. Reproduced by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

The show consisted of solo songs, choruses and conundrums – one-line jokes at the expense of members of the audience. Scott explained: “As everyone knows, a nigger minstrel performance consists of a number of songs and choruses, between which the ball of conversation is kept rolling amongst the various minstrels in the form of weighty conundrums, which, after numerous futile attempts from others, are usually answered by the propounder himself.” These jokes were a familiar aspect of the British offshoot of blackface, which developed as a distinctive counterpart to its coarser American predecessor to become more refined and sentimental. In particular, the malapropism of American versions was assimilated and overridden by English forms of comic language, such as the pun, though the questionable Dishcover jokes hardly support the idea that comic language was in any way refined. Most of the puns that came from the reddened lips of the Dishcover Minstrels were shoddy wisecracks, with Scott also noting that, “I don’t know why a joke should sound

better in nigger language, but I rather think the class of joke made on these occasions does so,” suggesting that the captain himself thought that lowbrow wit belonged somehow to the domain of alleged racial inferiors.²³ Two conundrums were already visible to the crew at the beginning of the evening, painted on the drop scene by Barne and indicative of the low level of humour. In bold letters were, “Why was Crater (H)ill? Because it saw the Castle Rock,” and, “Why did Hut Point? Because it saw a she slope around the corner.” Barne himself admitted that he felt obliged to add on a little illustration to explain the jokes, as they were “very far fetched.”²⁴

Victor Turner argues that theatre addresses social conflict. “Even when, in certain kinds of theatre, in different cultures, conflict may appear to be muted or deflected or rendered as a playful or joyous struggle, it is not hard to detect threads of connection between elements of the play and sources of conflict in sociocultural milieus.”²⁵ The connections between aspects of the minstrel show and the difficulties aboard the *Discovery* are easily decipherable. The conundrums presented to the audience were the most basic attempt at addressing social conflict in the Antarctic milieu, a relatively benign but nonetheless effective method for what Lawrence Levine would describe as laughing at hopelessness, or the humour of absurdity, “the desire to place the situation in which we find ourselves into perspective; to exert some degree of control over our environment... it often exists the most urgently in those who exert the least power over their immediate environment.”²⁶ As outlined above, the Antarctic

²³ Scott, *The Voyage of Discovery*, 262.

²⁴ Barne diary, 4 August 1902. Some explanation is warranted: Crater Hill, Castle Rock and Hut Point were all geographical points of significance to the crew, having been named on this expedition. “She slope” is most likely a play on “ski slope.”

²⁵ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 105.

²⁶ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 300.

explorers, a category of hero defined by romanticised fantasies of transgressing space, had become immobile, powerless subjects – particularly the lowest-ranking crewmembers, wholly subject to officers’ and scientists’ commands – in a harsh environment that was full of hopeless absurdities.

The minstrel show seemingly spared no one of ridicule, with Barne noting, “They had several of us on toast.”²⁷ The minstrels ridiculed Koettlitz, the surly doctor who administered the monthly medical inspections, for his alleged “thirst for blood.” Next, they satirised Armitage’s preference for staying indoors.²⁸ Other conundrums took the uncomfortable conditions of the *Discovery* and the Antarctic environment as the objects of their playful scorn, such as the perpetual darkness, but rendered in racist dialect associated with the subtropical plantation-belt American South: “Massa squash can yu told me why de crew ob de ‘Discovery’ am like yur mudder?”... “Because dey am waiting fur de sun’s return.”²⁹ The windmill, which was meant to have powered lamps throughout the boat, was another general butt of many jokes as it had broken repeatedly throughout the winter and failed to provide any electricity. This kind of humour both acknowledged the fantastical nature of the Antarctic climate but also served to detract from its sheer debilitating totality.³⁰ Some jokes defy understanding, the cook being likened to a cooper round a cask, because he was always “doing a tap,” while the nature of others is all too clear: “Can you told me, Massa Bones, wham am de best way to clear lower-deck in de Dishcurby?” The answer being, “You tak’ an’ open a tin of —’s Brussels sprouts.”³¹

²⁷ Barne diary, 6 August 1902.

²⁸ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 144.

²⁹ *South Polar Times*, Vol. V, 23 August 1902.

³⁰ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 311.

³¹ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 263.

This kind of humour exposed the minstrel show's ability to evoke child's play, to approximate life before the onset of adulthood through nonsense songs, carnal humour and physical japes. Lott suggests that simplistic or vulgar humour in the minstrel show can be regarded as belonging to an overarching infantilising strategy by whites that served to pass off black culture as being in an early stage of development, pointing to the minstrel's oversized clothes, enormous collars and shoes several sizes too big as depicting the black figure as too young for the garb of civilisation. Crucially, there was an immense pleasure for the actors behind the black masks in behaving childishly, in reaching back to "long-prohibited pleasure in nonlogical modes of thinking and speaking, or simply to the child's helplessness before its bodily demands."³² On board the *Discovery*, this indulgence in infantile humour, superimposed on the painted black body, arguably had the effect of allowing the performers and the audience to indulge in comforting notions of the nursery or even womb to escape the environment that necessitated maturity and acceptance of death. Indeed, the minstrels even sang "Cock Robin," an English nursery rhyme. And yet, it was only through mimicking – perhaps even enviously – an allegedly inferior, racially defined Other that the men could realise such childish pleasures. Herein lay the success of the minstrel show: that men considered the epitome of white, nationalistic masculinity could use absurd, stereotyped representations of blackness to relax, tease and reconfigure the heroic sensibilities augmenting their bodies and mission. As much as they tried to naturalise the supposed inferiority of black characters, they instead unwittingly affirmed their importance to white endeavour.

³² Lott, *Love & Theft*, 143.

Barne, Royds and Armitage wrote about the conundrum targeting the captain; no comment can be found in the limited number of journals from the lower decks, suggesting the sailors may have been reluctant to document their enjoyment of the joke. “Why is the Captain not worth a parson’s damn? Because he is a great Scott!” Barne noted that after giving the question the minstrels waited a long time before giving the answer, during which Royds became visibly uncomfortable at the piano.³³ Royds wrote after the event, somewhat anxiously, “I don’t know what the Captain thought of it, but he hasn’t said anything yet,” revealing his consternation at the pun’s injudicious proximity to the boundaries of offensiveness to the most senior officer and leader of the expedition.³⁴ Scott may have taken it in a good humour, mentioning the cold as the only detriment to the evening’s enjoyment. Or perhaps he seethed, preferring not to commit it to print, for fear this outburst from the imperial outpost might reach a broader audience, which he certainly expected for his journals.

It is evident that the joke spoke to pre-existing tension within their community. Two men who performed at the Royal Terror Theatre that night, both of whom also dressed-up and tortured the scientific staff during the Father Neptune episode, were among the first to be sent home with the relief ship *Morning* in February 1903.³⁵ Page, who played Bones in the minstrel show, was also Doctor Dry Drugs in the Father Neptune episode and sang a topical song satirising the doctors and engineer Skelton before the performance of *A Ticket-*

³³ Barne diary, 6 August 1902.

³⁴ Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W R Royds RN*, 156.

³⁵ The *Morning* was a relief ship sent to help the *Discovery* with departure from Antarctic shores in the summer of 1903 and to help with magnetic surveying and geographic exploration. However, the *Discovery* was firmly iced-in upon the *Morning*’s arrival. Clements Markham had prepared for this possibility by sending with the *Morning* a letter authorising Scott to stay another year on the ice. The *Morning* returned once more in 1904 to help the *Discovery* break free from the ice.

of-Leave; Duncan, or Tom Sawdust, was also the sergeant in Father Neptune's entourage.

These men were not held in high favour – at least not by Scott, who wrote: “It is certainly a great matter for congratulation that we are rid of the undesirable members of community... there was always the knowledge that they were on board, mixing freely with others, ready to fan the flame of discontent.”³⁶ In short, “undesirables... mixed [*too*] freely.” That is, if Duncan, a carpenter's mate – among the very lowest ranks – mingled at all, he perforce would have fraternised with seamen and officers putatively “above his station.” This could not be countenanced. At the first opportunity, the captain promptly removed men who repeatedly transgressed in this manner, offstage and on, with a tongue-in-cheek knowingness pushing the limits of class and naval boundaries through the liminality offered by costuming. Nevertheless, in a perhaps forced gesture of good humour, Scott summed up the nature of the evening's jokes, and their ability to release a significant amount of psychic tension, when he wrote:

The jokes were nearly all home-made and topical, but amused us none the less for that; everyone had some sly shaft of wit aimed at him, but all in the best of good humour, and so the merry jests went round until something had been said about the ship, the dogs, the windmill, the people and every imaginable or unimaginable thing about us, and on the whole they afforded us a good deal of hearty laughter.³⁷

Perhaps the biggest joke of the night for the white audience, however, was the black body itself: the preposterous concept of a racially defined figure, rendered unintelligent and dependent on his white master, appearing on the

³⁶ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 493.

³⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 263.

Antarctic landscape. Levine has argued that black humour drew awareness to the displaced, disenfranchised nature of black bodies in environments where whiteness was considered the normative subjective experience, namely America. I would suggest that in Antarctica, whiteness was not only the assumed pre-condition of all people in power but also of the landscape itself, which was both white in the literal sense and figuratively “whited-out” by colonial powers with vested interests seeking to colour the maps of the continent through imperial acquisition. In this milieu, the minstrel clown represented an out-of-place blackness in an otherwise uniform space, his disjointed and illogical presence creating a breakage or inversion of reality. This breakage, liminality or “in-betweenness” provided alibi, excuse and “unpredictable potential” for acting out contradictory impulses by providing a temporary existence between regulated social spaces.³⁸ The men could safely unburden tension, voice class criticism and push the boundaries of acceptability with jokes at Captain Scott’s expense, the environment and the dilapidated state of the ship. Racial paradigms, then, had hidden uses for those keen to question hierarchies.

Furthermore, the attention given to the bodily differences of the blacked-up men, that is, gazing at their blackness, spoke volumes to the heightened sensitivities with which men regarded their own threatened bodies. Blackface trained a conscious regard on the material self through the necessary rematerialisations that were required of its performance. The desire to try on a black body in the Antarctic went beyond the gag of “Jim Crow on snow.” While I will argue below that the plantation songs allowed the men to air colonial grievances from behind the mask, it is worth noting here that it is possible the

³⁸ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 35.

desire to try on the black body was also born out of its putative heightened masculinity. If blackface cannot be extricated from a longing for and fascination with the black penis, then how did this racist rematerialisation inflect the men's engagement with the deathly landscape?³⁹ Did blacking-up represent a desire for a greater, if false, sense of phallic manliness, not dissimilar to Father Neptune presented in the previous chapter? This certainly seems the case, for putting on white notions of "blackness" allowed for a "complex affair of manly mimicry" to combat the sense of corporeal worsening. In the white imaginary, the primary site of power for blackness was always in the body, and as Lott argues, material transformations were literal: "To wear or even enjoy blackness was literally, for a time, to become black, to inherit the cool, virility, humility, abandon, or *gaité de coeur* that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood."⁴⁰ This sense of abandon, as shown, gave room for all sorts of lowbrow, risqué wit and class critique. And yet, blackness also served as a repository for fears over excessive sexuality and was used to bolster the boundaries of the white male body through separation and difference. For men struggling to maintain their white corporeality in freezing weather, this act of boundary-setting due to racial anxiety was key: to black up was to reaffirm whiteness.

In all, this appropriation of the body of the Other to salve the failing white body was a temporary distortion of the idealised kind of nationalised figure

³⁹ Lott has pointed to erroneous conceptualisations of the "rampageous black penis" in the American psyche as the being at the centre of white men's recurring obsession (and repulsion) with male blackness. While the sexual organ itself was the object of white envy, it came to represent the entire white, delusional fantasy on which minstrelsy rested. "Bold swagger, irrepressible desire, sheer bodily display: in a real sense the minstrel man *was* the penis, that organ returning in a variety of contexts, at times ludicrous, at others rather less so." *Love & Theft*, 25–26.

⁴⁰ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 52.

that the men had previously attempted to become through their bodybuilding, and betrayed a subtle appreciation for traditionally colonised subjects in an area devoid of their presence. It further made cognisant the expedition's sharp class differentials; for all the bodybuilding and medical attention, an ordinary crewmember's endangered body could never attain the same status of heroic white explorer that Scott simultaneously represented and helped manufacture.

Furthermore, the performance of blackface, the focus on the powerful male form and the time given to childish, bodily humour can be regarded as a form of grotesque humour that lowered the world to the material level. Crass jokes drew attention to the lower stratum of the body, namely the belly, butt, and sexual organs, known for their reproductive functions and excretions. Viewed this way, the black penis that the men were so willing to try on was in fact a celebration of the regenerative aspects of the human anatomy – even as Brussels sprouts cleared both the literal and metaphorical lower decks. These regenerative characteristics of “fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance” (as well as a countervailing purgative, real or imagined) seem fitting given the corporeal degradation suffered through polar winter.⁴¹ In colonial meltdown or deep freeze, then, it was black masculinity that rebirthed white colonial mastery.

Light-heartedness and masculine energy were just two aspects of the show that allowed the men in their liminal states to engage alternatively with the Antarctic sublime. I have argued that preparation for the performance of the minstrel show saw the *Discovery*'s mundane items rematerialised into items of racial prejudice. I have also suggested that the humdrum of Antarctic life was inverted by the nature of this performance; in the in-between social space of

⁴¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19.

racist theatre, the sailors could ridicule the established naval order through lowbrow conundrums. I will now turn to the songs sung on the evening to extend my argument about the role of blackface to the *Discovery* Expedition.

“That little ship away down in the ice”

The songs sung by the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe reveal the anxieties in the collective subconscious of the expedition concerning death, glory and racial purity. The crew witnessed the spectacle of the suffering black body in order to air their own fears regarding the environment and their pretensions of heroic suffering in an otherwise claustrophobic environment not conducive to emotional outpouring. Furthermore, the largely working-class cast evoked faithful slave narratives from the American South to align themselves, through analogy, as productive subjects within a greater cause. Behind these elements were a systematic occluding of black bodies and labour and an outpouring of homoerotic desire.

There is a lack of scholarship on blackface outside of American national borders and an even greater dearth on British iterations, despite the fact that British blackface was an incredibly popular form of entertainment that outlasted its American equivalent, remaining popular until the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, blackface abroad differed in its distorted representations of black culture, reflecting diverging national consciousnesses and attitudes towards performance traditions. As compared to America, nineteenth-century Britain had a much smaller black population. There might have seemed little use for an art form to act as a mediator between black and white cultures. However, minstrel acts,

troupes and shows spread rapidly throughout Britain from as early as the 1830s to become a regular feature at “virtually every venue of popular gathering, from seaside to galas, festivals, town fairs and mops, agricultural shows, charity shows, club days, pantomimes and so on.”⁴² Thomas D. Rice, whose success in London was astronomical, and American minstrel troupe ensembles such as Dan Emmett’s Virginia Minstrels and Edward Pell’s Ethiopian Serenaders, were some of the first touring acts to ignite an enduring cross-class fascination with minstrelsy in Britain. Cultural analyst Michael Pickering succinctly labels the widespread raucous enjoyment of minstrelsy as a temporary breaking of the stiff upper lip of British society through the medium of red-painted lip.⁴³

Over the course of the century, nostalgic shows about life on the plantation became particularly popular, reflecting curiosity about the New World and its populations. Furthermore, the rawer, rougher aspects of American blackface were downplayed in favour of a more saccharine, sentimental approach.⁴⁴ British minstrels wore white waistcoats and conventional tailcoats, were supported by an orchestra and sang from a heterogeneous selection of songs and styles, thereby freeing themselves of much vulgarity that accompanied shows in taverns and docks. Importantly, this change in form was matched by a growing concentration on “vicarious longing or regret,” especially towards the tatterdemalion plantation slave.⁴⁵ This sadness or sentimentality, theatre historian J. Bratton suggests, was born out of sympathy for the slave as a noble, suffering fellow and a “deep-rooted romantic feeling about the noble savage,” though the contradictions glare considering Britain’s role in the establishment of slavery and

⁴² Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 181; Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, xi.

⁴³ Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 195–96.

⁴⁴ Pickering, “John Bull in blackface,” 191.

⁴⁵ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 20.

the linking of “the oppressed slave to the black-face impersonators, who were, as white Americans, more likely to be representatives of the oppressors.”⁴⁶ As will be shown, this sense of regret towards the plantation slave can easily be exposed as a hollow sentiment.

The crew saw in their own white, perverse fantasies of slavery a fitting allegory for their predicament. I have argued earlier that the literature of polar exploration circulates a convincing prison analogy, the hard conditions and oft-dull colours of frozen continents mirroring the grey, suffocating walls of prison. The performers, working-class men more burdened with Antarctic labour, were able to extend this prison analogy to include the plantation, assuming a similarity in punishing work between the two. Pickering has shown that the British working class perpetuated close comparisons to American slaves during minstrelsy’s boom in the nineteenth century as a means to articulate their own social, economic and political strife.⁴⁷ The mess deck, of a similar class, can be regarded as adopting similar strategies to air grievances about their own struggles: given tasks at the beginning of the day ranging from digging snow to repairing equipment and attending to the stove, the men were constantly preoccupied with chores throughout the day. “I do not remember a time when there was not a great amount of work to be done,” Scott wrote.⁴⁸ Whereas the audience of officers

⁴⁶ Bratton, “English Ethiopians,” 133.

⁴⁷ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 82. Furthermore, as Lott notes, in the context of rapidly expanding America, nostalgia was prevalent in blackface songs, indicating “a rather widespread preoccupation with traumatic parting, distance, temporal and geographical breaks.” Lott, *Love & Theft*, 191. Over a half a century later, the *Discovery* crew were in the midst of the greatest geographical break possible, the very alien landscape of Antarctica, situated on the absolute edge of civilisation and disenfranchised from the rest of the world. As such, they also sought to articulate their physical and emotional separation through minstrel song.

⁴⁸ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 208. In polar historiography, there is often the perception that the lower decks were somehow bored or without work. For example, Fiennes suggests that there was much “slack time” among the lower decks, whereas the officers were busy with scientific observations. *Captain Scott*, 78. However, I find this a particularly classed interpretation, in that too often it is assumed that scientific research was the only (and worthy)

might have recognised the crack of the overseer's whip as analogous to the senseless punishment of an irrational environment, the classed complaints of the actors may have gone unnoticed – indeed, they were likely often designed to vent frustrations within the class without drawing undue consternation from outside the class.

Though there is only one extant record of two altered lyrics, shown below in the parody of “The Old Log Cabin Down the Lane,” it is highly likely that lyrics to the other famous minstrel songs were also localised for the performance, ridiculing the otherworldly aspects of Antarctic life to some extent. I suggest that songs were chosen and altered because of the very fact that their original message was somewhat on point; their relevance meant that the crew could adopt or adapt their well-known lines to convey added meaning. It is probable that verses were adapted but choruses left relatively the same so that the audience could join in, as suggested by Scott, who wrote: “Of course in the choruses of ‘Marching through Georgia,’ ‘Golden Slippers,’ ‘Suwannee River,’ and such songs, the audience felt that they must also ‘lend a hand.’”⁴⁹ As such, based on this reasoning and the similarity of the parody of “The Old Log Cabin Down the Lane” to well-known versions, I cautiously refer to songs in their original versions throughout the following section.

Petty Officer Thomas Kennar's parody of “The Old Log Cabin Down the Lane” is the only record of altered lyrics, rendered in some detail in Barne's lengthy description of the night. Kennar was known to have a terrible singing voice – so terrible in fact that it was noted in many of the journals that mention

“job” of the crew and those not performing it were bored or forlorn. While the lower decks left little written record of their experience, the work patterns of Scott's men can be gleamed from quotes such as Scott's, which hardly suggest much idle time throughout the day.

⁴⁹ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 262-263.

the show. Armitage described him as “tone-deaf, though exceedingly fond of singing.”⁵⁰ Kennar attempted to play an autoharp given to him before departure. Barne wrote that Kennar had no idea how to play it, suggesting it was packed solely to provide the men with a little humour. Unfortunately, Kennar struggled just as much with his singing. Barne noted humorously that he couldn’t even find “L Flat.”⁵¹ Further:

Kennar sang a topical song, which was, according to the programme, by way of being a parody of “The Old Log Cabin Down the Lane”, but beyond the name, it had not the slightest resemblance to the song... After playing a little overture, he began the most extraordinary song I have ever heard, half singing & half talking, every now and then stopping to play a little tune. He tried to sing nigger fashion, but every time he finished up the line in West Country. The two lines that came oftenest, were “The dogs sets up their ’owls, when I lays down to rest, in that little ship away down in the ice.” Now and then a verse would end, “for I’m John James Brown, the dandy coloured coon.”⁵²

Will S. Hays wrote the original “Little Old Log Cabin Down the Lane” in 1871, depicting an old slave living his final years in a dilapidated cabin. The original words offer clues as to how the lyrics were altered to reflect Antarctic reality.

I am getting old and feeble now, I cannot work no more,
 I’ve laid de rusty bladed hoe to rest,
 Ole massa an’ old miss’s am dead, dey’re sleepin’ side by side,
 Deir spirits now are roaming wid de blest;
 De scene am changed about de place, de darkies am all gone,
 I’ll nebber hear dem singing in de cane,
 And I’s de only one dat’s left wid dis ole dog ob mine,
 In de little old log cabin in de lane.

Chorus

⁵⁰ Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 105.

⁵¹ Barne diary, 6 August 1902. L Flat is not a real note.

⁵² Barne diary, 6 August 1902.

De chimney's falling down, and de roof is cavin' in,
 I ain't got long round here to remain,
 But de angels watches over me when I lays down to sleep,
 In de little old log cabin in de lane.

Dar was a happy time to me, 'twas many years ago,
 When de darkies used to gather round de door,
 When dey used to dance an' sing at night, I played de banjo,
 But alas, I cannot play it any more.
 De hinges dey got rusted an' de door has tumbled down,
 And de roof lets in de sunshine an' de rain,
 An' de only friend I've got now is dig good ole dog ob mine,
 In de little old log cabin in de lane.

De foot-path now is covered o'er dat led us round de hill,
 And de fences all are going to decay,
 An' de creek is all dried up where we used to go to mill,
 De time has turned its course an odder way.
 But I ain't got long to stay here, an' what little I got,
 I'll try and be contended to remain,
 Till death shall call my dog an' me to find a better home,
 Dan dat little old log cabin in de lane.⁵³

I disagree with Barne's assessment that Kennar's version had "not the slightest resemblance" to the original. The most frequent alteration was the change of "that little old cabin in the lane" to "that little ship away down in the ice," a change of the most significant nouns rather than a complete rewrite. Kennar's alterations of lyrics can be regarded as a localisation of the song's original imagery, with its main themes kept in tact so as to offer another layer of meaning and humour.

The original song focuses on the increasing dilapidation of an old slave's home and his impending death due to age. Kennar used this imagery to help convey his frustration at the cramped conditions of the *Discovery* and his exhausted, ailing body. "That little ship away down in the ice" was rendered as adverse a domicile as the cabin, which in the original song features a broken

⁵³ William Hays, "The Little Old Cabin in the Lane" (New York: J.L. Peters, 1871), accessed 15 September 2014, 3–5, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm_b0839/.

chimney, a collapsed roof and no protection from the elements, a description befitting the *Discovery*, which was constantly bemoaned in expedition diaries for its low inside temperatures, leakages and smoky atmosphere. Kennar expressed social discomfort by superimposing Antarctic life onto the suffering of plantation workers; he believed it a fitting analogy of Antarctic living.

Furthermore, though the original lyrics recirculated white fantasies of “happy darkies” of old, they also briefly referenced the all-encompassing green of the sugarcane – a sub-tropical plantation staple that required slaves’ most arduous labour. Men on the lowest rungs of the expedition hierarchies – made to cut paths, dig snow, plant guide ropes, and suffer pains only imagined by Scott in the great white global south – may have felt some sense of affiliation with their black class counterparts cutting cane, roping bundles, and hauling them to the mill.

Death was prevalent in the lyrics too. The old masters of the plantation now lie buried in the ground, the slave songs have largely ceased, and it is only the devoted slave who still lives. The landscape has become lifeless, dried-out and decaying. Kennar used this sad imagery to lament the equally barren and inhospitable landscape around him. Similarities abound elsewhere: both slave-protagonist and explorer had the company of dogs. In Hays’ original version, dogs were portrayed as the singer’s last remaining friend: when the man lay down to pass away, his canine friend accompanied him. In the Antarctic version, the dogs were cast as a nuisance; they “set up their ’owls.” According to Captain Scott’s diary, the dogs, used for pulling sleds, were a continual source of aural discomfort during the night.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Scott had in fact assigned every

⁵⁴ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 255.

crewmember with a dog for companionship and a sense of responsibility throughout winter to help combat malaise. This decision had mixed results, giving the crew the much-needed task of caring for and walking their dog, while proving rather disturbing when their anthropomorphised pets savagely attacked and sometimes killed one another.⁵⁵ In a further surreal, racist twist, one of the expedition's puppies had been given the name "Nigger" by the crew; he was "a black dog with some tawny markings, and possessed the most magnificent head and chest."⁵⁶ The focus on his bodily prowess eerily reflected the animalised power assigned to the black body in the white imaginary presented elsewhere. Growing up into a violent dog, "Nigger" had previously killed fellow hound "Paddy" (also a racist slur against the Irish since the late eighteenth century) during the night and allegedly wagged his tail innocently the next morning. Scott later remarked that his name "wholly failed to convey the grandeur of his nature."⁵⁷

The second line adapted by Kennar is perhaps the most glaringly racist, "for I'm John James Brown, the dandy coloured coon," named after the famous abolitionist who had a small but crucial part in tipping America into civil war. For his sympathies towards slave suffering, Kennar labelled Brown, and himself, as a "dandy coloured coon," a black man painted white, an image that is complicated by the fact that Kennar was, temporarily, a white man coloured black, singing about being a white man whose defence of slaves resulted in accusations that he was actually a black man coloured white. The line's slipperiness ambivalently interrogates racial categorisations through its parodying of black-white binary oppositions. Where the men used the liminality

⁵⁵ Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice*, 141.

⁵⁶ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 385.

⁵⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 321.

produced by blackness to act out rebellious impulses, here they playfully teased that process by inverting the direction of racial masquerade. However, though it was acceptable among white society for a white man to black up, Brown's reverse black-to-white trajectory was portrayed here as an abomination.

To be labelled a "dandy coloured coon" by a white performer was to ridicule Brown for his alleged position as a "nigger-lover." "Dandy" also referenced the ridicule of some black men's alleged desire for middle-class appearances, tastes and language, a stereotype wholly conjured by the white racial imaginary. The image of black dandies, who supposedly considered themselves better than others, in fact represented a cross-racial identification with white dandies: charlatan men seen as roving "streetwalkers" who aspired to lives of leisure.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the choice of "dandy" also referenced both the accusations of homoerotic shadings in Brown's defence of black people and the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895, only a decade before the *Discovery* expedition took place. At the time, "dandy" was increasingly becoming a derogatory phrase that encompassed negative connotations towards effeminacy or even homosexuality. Brown on ice then, becomes something of a spectacle of gendered, raced and classed trouble; he is a cross-pollinated paradigm of the Other.

Kennar's song turned the absurdities and loss of control that came with sleeping on a ship frozen in the Antarctic Ocean into a source of laughter. It was also humorous due to the absurdity of the actual performance, which by Barne's account was a hodgepodge of minstrelsy, British West Country singing and tragic autoharp playing. Indeed, Kennar's performance can be regarded as a

⁵⁸ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 133; Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork*, 209.

rather crude adoption of minstrel performative techniques, and it is worth dwelling on amateurism in relation to more “authentic” forms. I do not mean to suggest that theatrical traditions are static, unchanging entities that do not shape and appropriate qualities over time and place. Kennar’s song reimaged aspects of Antarctic living on stage, producing an unsympathetic representation but nonetheless one that could only make sense within the confines of the crew’s society, suggesting that minstrelsy was a malleable phenomenon that could be recontextualised at will and was not spatially bound. This performance can be regarded as another site of amateur blackface, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

However, there is something in Kennar’s own disregard for minstrel musical techniques, his awful singing voice, his tendency to half-speak lyrics, and his untutored autoharp playing, that does not so much suggest a minstrelsy performance but a half-hearted, slapdash representation of it. Was Kennar’s inferior performance representative of a form of racist debasement? It certainly diverged from the British blackface tendencies of refinement, sentimentality and musical skill. It is difficult to know whether to accept Kennar, clanging away at his instrument, and the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe as the genesis of a short-lived subgenre of Antarctic minstrelsy bound to its specific space and time, or whether to view Kennar’s flagrant disregard for pre-existing performative structures as symbolic of his own racism towards (wrongly assumed) black cultural practices.

Despite the fact that the crew enjoyed Kennar’s song with side-splitting laughter, behind the cheer was a form of social resistance at the expedition’s realities and an acting out of fears – a safe rebellion from behind the mask. A quick gloss of the other songs performed in their original forms immediately confirms that the

themes of death and freedom were prevalent. In particular, classic American minstrel songs by famous composer and minstrel enthusiast Stephen Foster were heavily represented on the programme. Foster's plantation melodies conjured up feelings "for the glad days past and never to return."⁵⁹ His old plantation melody, "Old Uncle Ned," must have fallen on sympathetic ears, the original lyrics, known to the crew, resonating and resulting in the song choice. One of Foster's best-known minstrel numbers, "Old Uncle Ned," sentimentalised the plantation, depicting a slave that endured a life of backbreaking work and a resultant entry into heaven.

His fingers were long like de cane in de brake,
 He had no eyes for to see;
 He had no teeth for to eat de corn cake,
 So he had to let de corn cake be.

Chorus

Den lay down de shubble and de hoe,
 Hang up de fiddle and de bow:
 No more hard work for poor Old Ned,
 He's gone whar de good Niggas go.⁶⁰

Consider Ned's body, which has been affected through years of gruelling toil on the plantation: his fingers are long like canes, thin and worn; his eyes are so weak he can barely see; he can no longer eat because his teeth have crumbled away. The failings of Ned's body were a clear analogy for those being suffered by the crew: fingers cracked with frostbite, eyes blighted by snow blindness, and teeth bleeding with scurvy were the most frequent illnesses caused by freezing temperatures. It is not hard to imagine how a slight alteration of these lyrics would have resonated with the explorers, who mobilised the image of Ned as a

⁵⁹ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 187.

⁶⁰ Foster, "Uncle Ned," 3–4.

figurative language to describe their own afflictions. Even though these kinds of plantation songs elicited an amount of sympathy for their protagonists, they kept racial hierarchies firmly in place: whatever Ned may have been, he was immortalised as a loyal slave. While in their perverse analogic thinking the crew would have sympathised with noble Ned as another faithful servant of suffering, this sympathy had boundaries established in part by the heroic endeavours of white men complicit in the social construction of masculinity, whiteness and “civilisation” back home.

Blessed with the backing of the nation and revelling in the elitist, masculine spirit of their endeavour, the crew cultivated pretensions regarding the importance of their work and the possibilities of glory upon return. Uncle Ned’s slow collapse of health is due to toil and servitude; when he dies, the shovel and hoe are laid down and there is no more hard work to be done. Death finally carries him “home,” that is, a heaven where only “good Niggas” go. Similarly, the crew fathomed their own death would result in a similar outcome, their grit, determination and servitude acting as justification for an ascent into heaven. In “Good Old Jeff,” sung by Able Seaman William Heald, or Birdie, the imagery presented is very much the same: “’Twas about a poor old darkie Jeff, That liv’d for many a year / But now he’s dead and in his grave, No trouble does he fear / For good old Jeff has gone to rest / We know that he is free / Disturb him not, but let him rest / Way down in Tennessee.”⁶¹ Death runs through the lyrics as a central theme, but this is not an overly morbid song. Rather, Jeff’s passing is described as “rest,” where he is “free.”⁶²

⁶¹ R. Griffin, “Good Old Jeff” (Leeds: George Bell, 1869), 2–3.

⁶² Even more repetitious, the song “Poor Old George” was a slight alteration of “Poor Old Jeff,” having an almost identical chorus. The “George” in the song title was a reference to its singer Able Seaman Thomas Williamson, whose minstrel name was George, highlighting the way the

Ned and Jeff – “good Niggas” – were a somewhat sympathetic but subjugating representation of the earnest slave who is rewarded bountifully in the afterlife –trivialising, however, his subjugation, as Christian doctrine so effectively did, in this earthly life. Performing this imagery was a veiled exploration of the desire to be appreciated for the daily grind of life in Antarctica, the kind of devoted but lowly work that would result in nationalist success but would take a considerable physical, mental and emotional toll on those performing it. The hardship of noble Ned was indicative of the British offshoot of blackface’s tendency to valorise suffering. However, Ned, “whose relationship to his owners seems to be based on mutual affection and respect,” was also a product of faithful slave narratives, made popular in mid-nineteenth-century America and beyond by men such as Foster and anything but an accurate representation of black slave experience.⁶³

Historian Micki McElya has shown that pro-slavery Southern whites created the myth of the devoted slave in order to counteract the increasing circulation of plantation horror stories by abolitionists and freedmen. Exemplified by faithful “mammy” figures, a beloved, dutiful woman who served the domestic and emotional needs of white families, these narratives became deeply ingrained in the American national consciousness, gaining considerable currency as “truth.” “Alongside growing critiques of Radical Republican programs for social change and racial equality, faithful slave narratives provided a nostalgic alternative to the economic depression and labor turmoil of the post-

cast sought to place themselves within the imagery of the song to better align their predicament with that of the American slave. Furthermore, the choosing and adaptation of two songs that were nearly identical reinforced the predisposition among the crew to perform songs about death.

⁶³ Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 28.

Civil War period... They served a wide range of emotional, economic, and political needs for white and black Americans.”⁶⁴

I would intervene here by highlighting the transatlantic, even global, appeal of the faithful slave, for some.⁶⁵ Though distinctly a Southern phenomenon in its perpetuation of a myth of halcyon days on the plantation, these narratives were so compelling in their imagery that during this colonial project, at least crewmembers if not the officers felt they could use the faithful slave as a fitting allegory for their own predicament. While the sadness felt towards the suffering plantation slave was born out of some British anti-slavery sentiment, the racist aspects of the minstrel show were paradoxically supported by this anti-slavery cause. British imperialism held that inferior races should progress to a higher social level – though only forcibly, indeed colonially, so.⁶⁶ This was often represented as the white man’s burden, his benevolent paternalism required of an overarching, divinely ordained civilising mission.

As such, faithful slave narratives were integrated into the British imaginary because they fitted so well with pre-existing ideologies: they gave currency to the idea that lower racially defined Others could capitalise on their potential if they were freed but fathered by the naturalised and Godly care of whites. In the *Discovery* episode, though the audience was supposed to feel regret towards Ned, they were also made to believe he required, even wanted,

⁶⁴ Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy, The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11–13. Ironically, it was the 1852 abolitionist text *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe that helped propel the mammy figure to a much wider audience.

⁶⁵ Though authors such as Pickering have shown that plantation songs about Old Dixie were popular in Britain, they have not made connections to the faithful slave myth that originated in America, nor do they show that these narratives were so pervasive that they influenced imperialism. Furthermore, while Pickering makes a strong case for the British labourer’s identification with the slave, he does not theorise on how devotion was believed to be an alleged aspect of slave experience.

⁶⁶ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 112.

their care. This allowed for a paradoxical synthesis of anti-slavery sentiment with British imperialist discourse that allowed the cast to analogise the slave while declare that his salvation was only achievable through his devotion to white, colonial masters. As such, I suggest that the underlying pervasiveness of faithful slave narratives in British blackface formations exposed the hostility to American slave labour as something of a false construct; instead, the vapid regret at Uncle Ned's situation acted as a legitimisation for audiences to enjoy the spectacularisation of black suffering played out on stage.

I would further suggest that the faithful slave character was so compelling an ideal that it made appealing in British society the alleged glory days of life in the antebellum South, thereby imbuing the performance tradition with an air of respectability that made it distinctly popular with all social strata in Britain.⁶⁷ This sanitisation of slavery's history too neatly glossed over British complicity in the acquisition of black bodies and political inertia over the American slave economy and postbellum racial oppression.

Crucially, minstrelsy's popularity in Britain was in part attributable to its ability to invoke nostalgia for rurality during decades of intense urbanisation and socio-economic change; it provided a "sense of historical or geographical isolation from, and innocence of, contemporary adversity, turbulence and strife."⁶⁸ It seems easy to apply this analysis to the *Discovery* minstrels: songs such as "Old Uncle Ned" and "Golden Slippers" (presented below) expressed the crew's longing for pastoral England in an emotionally deprived, geographically monotonous environment. The sadness of the protagonists opened the door for feelings of homesickness and pining, emotions otherwise not readily expressed

⁶⁷ Pickering, "John Bull in blackface," 195–96.

⁶⁸ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 133.

during the day-to-day toil of Antarctic living. The influence of Southern mythologies of “antebellum moonlight and magnolias, cavaliers and fine ladies, and of course faithful slaves” to polar living seems startling.⁶⁹ The dreamscape of the plantation exerted influence far beyond its Southern borders; it had evidently been written into a collective transatlantic imaginary so convincingly that the men felt compelled to channel their nostalgic yearning for the landscape of Old England through the myth of an Edenic Old Dixie. It resulted in the lie of the happy-go-lucky banjo-playing slave permeating not only British shores from its reactionary beginnings to black emancipation, but also finding its way into previously pristine Antarctic space. The white poetics of racial domination were so prolific in their global iterations that they found articulation in lands hitherto untouched by humanity yet so quickly sullied by its realities.

In “Golden Slippers,” sung by Able Seaman George Croucher, the imagery of welcome death appears again: “So, it’s goodbye, children, I will have to go / Whar de rain don’t fall or de wind don’t blow / And yer ulster coats, why, yer will not need / When yer ride up in de chariot in de morn.”⁷⁰ The depiction of a man being taken to paradise by a chariot, away from the heavy winds and rains, would have proved a nice touch in the extreme Antarctic weather, as would have the image of the chariot taking off in the morning during the polar night. As already shown in the previous chapter, *A Ticket-of-Leave* was a rehearsal for return for the crew. During the minstrel show, the men also turned to amateur dramatics to articulate their concerns over corporeal rematerialisations as well as

⁶⁹ McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 12.

⁷⁰ James Bland, “Oh Dem Golden Slippers” (London: W. Paxton, year unknown), 2–3. This was a popular minstrel parody of the spiritual Civil War song “Golden Slippers.” The minstrel version was known as “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” but became shortened to “Golden Slippers,” blurring the lines between parody and original version. African-American James Bland wrote the song in 1879.

bodily reconfigurations for life back home away from their special collective. In the chorus of “Golden Slippers,” the protagonist sings: “Oh, dem golden slippers, Golden slippers I’s se goin’ to wear / To walk the golden street,” which suggests that in his looking forward to his entry into heaven along the golden street, he will make an effort to appear presentable and gentlemanly, that despite the current circumstances the passing into the immaterial realm will be accompanied by a return to a clean, gentrified appearance.

One evening, Ernest Shackleton appeared at Barne’s door, “gibbering like a madman, half dressed and falling about the cabin.” Shackleton had caught sight of himself in a mirror, and had been so utterly startled by his appearance that he decided to pretend to be a madman, his actions drawing quite a crowd.⁷¹ This kind of unstaged performance, with its heightened sensitivity to bodily transformation, was surely reflected and played out in the minstrel show, from the lyrical exploration of the desire to wear classed garb again in “Golden Slippers” to the awe expressed at the minstrels’ convincing rematerialisations as black men.

The constant preoccupation with entry into heaven or return to home was matched with a palpable fear that the crew would not actually survive the trials of their expedition. Some songs during the night probed these dark possibilities. “Swanee River” was sung by Duncan, “another large man with a harmonious but very plaintive voice,” whose song was “strongly impregnated with Dundee dialect,” suggesting regional as well as class hierarchies.⁷² The piece was very nostalgic, going so far as actually to long for the plantation. “All up and down de whole creation / Sadly I roam / Still longing for de old plantation / And for de old

⁷¹ Barne diary, 6 May 1902.

⁷² Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 105; Barne diary, 6 August 1902. Swanee River was written by Stephen Foster in 1851, and also goes by the name “Old Folks at Home.”

folks at home.”⁷³ The lyrics of Duncan’s song invite the notion that the protagonist may never again find what he is looking for, wandering up and down the entire earth with little hope like a ghostly figure never laid to rest. The plantation of this evocation, sanitised of its violent history, acted as an imaginary space for final bodily and mental convalescence – ephemeral images of a Southern Eden that were surely comforting to an audience that faced the possibility of death daily. Seaman George Vince had already died by falling off a cliff towards the end of a sledging expedition. His body, fallen in the pursuit of the imperial fantasy, was never found, forever lost in the ice and snow. Like the character in “Swanee River,” his spirit would roam the Antarctic wasteland looking for a previous time and place.

Of course, the recurring theme of death throughout the minstrel show also brought to the forefront the racist assumptions that governed the performance, lending significance in the context of the expedition’s imperialist exploration of Antarctica. To convey meaning, the laments of 6 August required the deaths of imaginary black people, not only producing emotional sentiment for the deceased, but also supervising their elimination: as Lott puts it, “metaphorical murder.”⁷⁴ There was an intense pleasure in the continually objectified and punished black body, even as this process was mutually constituted in other aims of the minstrel show. In “Old Kentucky Home,” sung on the night by Able Seaman Frank Wild, the lyrics betray a longing for death, for the singer but also for the black body itself. “The day goes by like a shadow o’er the heart / With sorrow where all was delight / The time has come when the darkies have to part /

⁷³ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 190.

⁷⁴ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 189.

Then my old Kentucky Home good-night!”⁷⁵ The day, passing as a shadow similar to the course of light in Antarctica, denotes a time when it is appropriate to die and the “darkies” have to bid their sweet home goodbye. Sorrow becomes something altogether happier, and, again, there is release and finality to be enjoyed. However, looking past the sentimentality, there is also the aggressive quality of this song to be considered: it systematically wished away black bodies altogether. Though a highly nostalgic piece, its sentimentalism was found in black misery. Lott argues that it was the “whole lamented business of slavery” that was being wishfully eliminated in minstrel songs, the black body in song representing the sorry process of slavery.⁷⁶ But this wishing-away was paradoxical, for it was absolutely necessary for the black figure to exist for him to be wished away; in other words, nostalgic minstrel songs could not exist without the black people they discursively attempted to deny existence. This, therefore, seems like a systematic creation and destruction of black figures for the purpose of expressing white discontent with social circumstances, rendering white projections of the black body as a symbolic marker of wider discontent.

In the case of Antarctica, without indigenous populations, it is clear that the construction of the black body through blackface, and the destruction of these black bodies through sentimental songs, served to fulfil a narrative of master-subject colonialism in a lifeless space. I will discuss further the implications of this form of imperialism later. Here, however, I would highlight that in singing about the perpetual destruction of the black body, the blacked-up men were self-referentially wishing away their own bodies – bodies that were blacked-up to portray the protagonists of songs. This was a subconscious death drive to escape

⁷⁵ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 190.

⁷⁶ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 189.

the oppressive winter and frightening, unknown land outside. Donning blackface was simultaneously trying on the mask of death, confronting it through lyrical exploration and denying it, a temporary exploration of a tabooed death wish in an environment where the men's primary objective was simply to exist in spite of grave difficulties.

As such, the resulting minstrel was condensed to a complex figure on stage, bound to different articulations of fear, laughter, death and longing.⁷⁷ But there is one more important factor to consider from behind the mask: the homoerotic undercurrents governing the show. As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a demonstrable link between polar and prison narratives, the cold cage inhibiting freedom of movement and encouraging homoerotic impulses in a society composed entirely of men. I want to further these arguments by looking critically at the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe through this prism to see how mimicking the black body and recreating the plantation spoke to homoerotic longing among the crew.

Blackface has long been associated with queer desire: it was, "an all-male entertainment form, combining racial and gender cross-dressing, male-bonding and racial exclusion, misogyny and drag," as well as streamlining an intense attention to the body.⁷⁸ Whites have long marked the male body as the primary site of the power of blackness, its hyper-sexuality, energy, virility and physicality the source of envy and the white hysteria that tried to contain it. For performers portraying black men there was a sense of eroticism in trying out this white fantasy of powerful black masculinity, the line between repulsion and envy of the black penis as blurred as that between love and hate of black cultural practices.

⁷⁷ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 190.

⁷⁸ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 28.

Similar to the bodybuilding presented in the previous chapter, where the desire for a muscular body form became a desire for another person's body, blackface also created an easy slippage from appreciation of allegedly potent black male sexuality to outright homoerotic longing for a male form. Also worth noting is that, traditionally, these theatrical troupes offered something of a haven for sexually ambiguous men (and, as suggested above, class critique and oppositional ideologies more generally), who could portray wench characters so convincingly that many in the audience were left uncertain as to whether they were in fact witnessing an impersonation at all.⁷⁹

In the case of the *Discovery*, I would suggest that the mess deck took on black forms out of a perceived sense of shared marginality, an ostracism ostensibly produced by naval ranking but heavily classed. This marginality arguably had bodily, if not sexual, connotations. The "lowerness" of the moniker "lower decks" suggests associations with dirt, filth, ingestion, excretion and reproduction – bodily processes belonging to the lower half of the body and ones already referenced in the conundrums. There is a similarity here between these men and early American performers who would indulge in blackface:

"Marginalized by temperament, by habit (often alcoholism), by ethnicity, even by sexual orientation, these artists immersed themselves in 'blackness' to indulge their felt sense of difference."⁸⁰ The pervasive sexual tension within the cramped lower decks had already been addressed in previous theatricals on board the *Discovery*. While there was, interestingly, no wench character in the troupe around which male longing could centre, an examination of the lyrics of the songs chosen on the night reveals sexually suggestive themes.

⁷⁹ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 53.

⁸⁰ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 51.

Cook's mate Clarke sang "Kingdom Coming" in "Scotch-nigger fashion, he was in black tights, with a white cloth around his waists, and a long red dressing gown."⁸¹ This description, written by Barne, along with the earlier mention of Duncan's Dundee accent, suggests an acknowledgement of marked differences between the English and Scottish contingents on board. "Scotch-nigger fashion" places Clarke's performance as a regional variation of minstrelsy, his thick accent disallowing his performance from the mainstream of the tradition and belonging instead to a Scottish subset. Written by Henry Clay Work in 1862 before the Emancipation Proclamation, the song celebrates promised freedom, and the overcoming of plantation masters:

Chorus

De massa run, ha, ha,
De darkey stay, ho, ho,
It mus' be now de kingdom comin',
In Dixie year of jubilo.

Verse

He six foot one way, two foot tudder,
An' weigh tree hundred pound,
His coat so big he couldn't pay de tailor,
An' it wont go half way round.
He drill so much they call him cap'n,
An' he got so dreful tanned,
I spec he try an fool dem Yankees,
For to tink he's contraband.

De obserseer he make us trouble,
An' he drike us round a spell,
We lock him up in de smokehouse cellar,
Wid de key trown in de well.
De whip is lost, de handcuff broken,
But de massa'll hab his pay,
He's ole enough, big enough, an' ought to know better,
Den to went an' run away.⁸²

⁸¹ Barne diary, 6 August 1902.

⁸² Henry Work, "Kingdom Coming" (Boston: Horace Partridge, 1862), 778.

The recurring jovial/dissident interrogation of command structure in the conundrums presented earlier is evident in this song, which deploys a slave-over-master inversion theme for comic effect and as a vehicle for teasing social order.⁸³ The mention of handcuffs, the locking up of the master, the key being thrown away – these are subversive metaphors from the plantation that speak to the prison-polar narrative and the subconscious desire to break free from iced-in conditions. “Massa” likely alluded to Captain Scott and some other officers, as well as Antarctica itself, the overall joke being that of an unlikely triumph over a dominating hierarchy.

Looking deeper, there is a homoerotic element to this song and the overall performance. The crew of the *Discovery* had already refashioned their sexual personas on two occasions; this time, however, they reworked their bodies to submit temporarily to objectification by the white, colonial male. As Michael Rogin succinctly puts it, “The masque turned into the desire to be illuminated by and for the white male gaze.”⁸⁴ In other words, the largely working-class cast blackened then spotlighted themselves (with at least six footlights) so that they could be acceptably objectified and sexualised by one another, but more so, by the officers in the audience. The concentration on the cast’s transformation, evidenced in Captain Scott’s lavish description of the night, and the extent to which the audience would be allowed to look long and hard at their blackened bodies are certainly suggestive of this.

The lyrics to “Kingdom Coming” can be read as having sexual connotations: the black body overcoming the white; the continual focus on accentuated bodily features; the tanned bodies that suggest little clothing; the

⁸³ Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 240–43.

⁸⁴ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 20.

feminisation of the master who runs away; the whips and chains that suggest coercion: these lines conjure earthy images of black and white bodies in tussle. The supposed raw power of the black body too is suggested here by its victory over chain and whip. This image of black overcoming white, debased overcoming alleged superior, destabilises and inverts the roles of slave and master, and in this subversion of power, the song's erotic elements surface. Perhaps the real object of scorn of the song was not the "massa" of environment or officer, but the masterful sexual tension among the crew, who seemingly could not find sexual reprieve in the cold corridors of the ship. Was it the encroachment of same-sex desire that they tried, and failed, to lock away, to metaphorically murder? Perhaps. But regardless of the nuances, the crew can be seen as negotiating its own homoeroticism through the medium of blackface, which has long held the purpose of "mediating white men's relations with other white men."⁸⁵

To conclude, the plantation songs of the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe allowed the cast and, by extension, audience to augment their languishing bodies with an aura of nostalgic glory for days gone by. Evocating the slave, the troupe of working-class sailors constructed a world where they were also dutiful sufferers who would one day find peace and entry into heaven, providing they continue to perform the alleged imperial attributes of strenuous work, obedience and faith in a greater cause. This false and perverse polar-plantation analogy, however, allowed for the wishing-away of black bodies, which were systematically eliminated in songs. I argue that this was a veiled death wish: the dying of the black body allowed the men to probe the taboo of surrender at a

⁸⁵ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 53.

time when stoicism and heroism were considered necessary in an environment that was slowly but surely taking its toll. Finally, I suggest that performing the black body allowed the men to address homoerotic tension, the minstrel becoming a sexualised spectacle for the white colonial explorer that gazed upon it.

En Route for the Terror Theatre

By all accounts, the production was a sterling success. Barne wrote: “It went off most excellently... I laughed till I nearly bust myself.”⁸⁶ There was agreement among the crew that some of the jokes at the expense of the audience erred on the side of awkward. Despite being the butt of one such joke, Captain Scott wrote in his journal, seemingly after a little deliberation: “When we got back to the ship after the performance we decided that in spite of the cold we had spent an extremely pleasant evening.”⁸⁷ Skelton noted that “Allan, Page, Kennar & Pilbeam were very good.”⁸⁸ Hodgson declared them all “very well got up,” while Duncan declared the minstrel show the “best” of the season.⁸⁹ The official review written in the *South Polar Times* waxed lyrical:

One of the best entertainments that has been given in the Royal Terror Theatre, was the Dishcover Minstrels’ show; it went off without a hitch and reflects great credit on the manager and troupe for the excellent way in which the whole thing was carried out. It must have required a good deal of resolution on the part of those who attended the rehearsals during the three weeks of stormy weather when the journey from the ship to the hut was often done in the face of a blizzard and the temperature well down in the minus thirties.

⁸⁶ Barne diary, 6 August 1902.

⁸⁷ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 263.

⁸⁸ Reginald Skelton diary, 6 August 1902, MS 342/1;BJ, Scott Polar Research Institute.

⁸⁹ Hodgson diary, 6 August 1902; Duncan diary, 6 August 1902.

The *South Polar Times* also ran an article featuring three of the conundrums, including “Massa Bones can yu told me what am de wuss vegetable de ‘Discobery’ left London wid? Why de Dundee leak ob course” – a homonym-based joke at the expense of the leaky ship and the Scottish contingent on board.⁹⁰ The feature included a picture of a minstrel with exaggerated, long red lips, one eye painted black, and the other white. Around the neck was a huge black-and-white bowtie with red polka dots; the minstrel was wearing an almost sinister, mocking smile. In the same edition there was a painting by surgeon and zoologist Edward Wilson titled *En Route for the Terror Theatre*, which shows dark, hooded men following guide ropes to a black hut, the outside snow lit solely by a beam of yellow light escaping through a small window.⁹¹ These two pictures effectively conjure two extremes of the minstrel show: the imposition of racist ideologies onto Antarctica and the extent to which men were willing to undergo physical harm in performing these ideologies.

Though critically acclaimed, the performance of the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe, despite its vivid descriptions in extant diaries, photos, the on-board newspaper and official published accounts, has had little academic analysis, save some dramaturgical enquiry. Crucially, however, the performance enables a critique of the class and racial hierarchies on which British formations and empire were founded; the image of the 12 men blacked-up in the whitest space alive under the banner of the Royal Geographical Society indexes a startling array of paradoxes and hypocrisies, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, the

⁹⁰ Ernest Shackleton and Louis Bernacchi, *The South Polar Times Vol. V April-August 1902* (London: Smith, Elder & Co), 2, 23.

⁹¹ Pearson, ““No Joke in Petticoats,”” 54.

minstrel show gave Antarctica an alternative story – one that suggests it is a more creative, potentially radical space than has been previously imagined.

As shown in Chapter 2, British society legitimised racial subordination on the poor material and economic achievements of supposedly inferior societies – the penniless blamed for their penury. In this milieu, the blackface clown became a fabricated identity for those who occupied the bottom rungs of a racially defined hierarchy, easing any sense of guilt about colonial domination.

Nevertheless, the influence of faithful slave narratives to this fabrication, the highlighting of obedient devotion as a characteristic of the Other, has seemingly been lost in the discourse. A focus on blackface enacted at colonial sites, such as the Arctic during Charles Francis Hall's first expedition, proves to be a significant intervention in the history of racial performances. I argue that in the American context it was a method of policing varied non-white racialised subjects as well as affirming white superiority by demonstrating the power to enter and control the black body. However, in the Antarctic, a tabula rasa in need of colonial scripting, there was no indigenous population on which to impart dominant values and ideologies. I would like to dwell, therefore, on the significance of blackface to imperialism in a colonial periphery almost devoid of human history.

I would argue that the minstrel show created a catharsis that sought to reconcile the work of empire building with its necessary racial and class domination. Captain Scott and the men, variously ranked, relished in a strong sense of purpose throughout their stay in Antarctica, and whereas other colonial expansion was run on the exploitation of racial subordinates, imperialist activity into the South Polar Regions could not very well rely on a subjugated subservient

racial Other. The progress of the men in expanding “civilisation” to the extreme ends of the world could not be measured by the performances of natives in relation to the usual top-down colonial systemisation of hygiene, gender and other intimate discourses of implementation. Without this subjugated figure, therefore, the working-class crew was forced to perform him themselves – by blacking-up they became the dominator and dominated to fulfil the narrative of colonialism known to them: namely, that empire-building required racial and class domination. It is no surprise that, as argued earlier, the black bodies they performed were systematically eradicated in songs. This represented the kind of symbolic violence perpetrated in traditional colonial sites, by elite administrators and the lower classes of servicemen who carried out their orders.

In choosing to clown, the benighted mess deck was serving a wider purpose: for the betterment of the expedition, they reaffirmed imperial righteousness by creating a spectacle out of the allegedly inferior racially defined Other. At a time when white civilisation was seen as the culmination of the evolutionary process, a viewpoint justified on its apparent industrial, technological and cultural achievements, “backward” ethnicities were declared in dire need of modernising within multiple pseudo-scientific discourses. Imperialism, regarded as the predestined responsibility of supposedly superior races, was a global project that would benefit all mankind. Even within unpeopled Antarctica, the aggressive transgression of space under the banner of king and country was seen as the next logical step for all human development, creating individualised, idealised masculine subjects – heroes – that jarred with the collective nature of progress. In this context, the performance of the fabricated representation of all “primitive” people, blackface, was used as a

reminder that white heroism, threatened by the environment, was the apex of humanity and could, indeed should, continue suffering for the advancement of all. Though the trying-on of blackness was about the trying-on of phallic manliness, the racist, hyperbolic aspects of the show maintained pre-ordained racial hierarchies that simultaneously kept this form of virile masculinity firmly in its place: at the bottom of the ladder, safe under the oppression of white power.

Furthermore, the crew was simultaneously masking its own complicity in imperial processes by turning the punished black figure into a more sanitised form of imperialist nostalgia. As shown, faithful slave narratives, though an American cultural formation, were pervasive myths that managed to penetrate British elite sensibilities and the more working-class performers who enacted them. The devoted slave became integrated into the suffering plantation black stock character that was enjoyed so fondly by white audiences. Suffering slaves were to be freed, but to remain under the paternalist care of whites. This synthesis of discourses masked complicity in the damaging and sorry mess of slavery and obscured inertia over present injustices. In Antarctica, the minstrel show's use of this dual mythology allowed some white men to remind themselves that progress for all races rested on their shoulders. It legitimised and spurred on their aggressive transgression into Antarctic space. By sanitising the past, they could look to the future with unbounded optimism. In essence, not only did the black figure remind the men of their white superiority, he also represented a nostalgic sentiment that whites had (misplaced) responsibility for those at the bottom of the hierarchy and for the world. This paternalism allowed the crew to believe they were similarly benevolent fathers of empire-building.

Though Antarctica was humanless, the activities of the few humans that did reach the continent have been richly documented. Nevertheless, the farcical activities of the *Discovery* Expedition have failed to achieve any level of fame, in part thanks to unsurprisingly reticent historiographies and a long-standing strategy of sustained essentialisation of polar explorers. By giving attention to polar blackface, therefore, I am challenging their historic immobility and current appropriation by those interested in exploiting polar spaces by offering a more revisionist representation that exposes and interrogates the foundations of the contemporary imperialist narratives about the continent. While it is not solely my intention to debunk the celebratory historiography surrounding these hitherto monolithic figures, my interrogations of farcical blackface delineate a more multifaceted history that shows Scott and his men capable of, and culpable in, perpetuating the racist ideologies of their day even as they remained instrumental in the social construction of heroism and the alleged progress of the “entire” human race.

In her analysis of American ideologies of polar exploration, Lisa Bloom argues that labelling polar spaces as “blank,” made easier by the seeming emptiness of these landscapes, was a discursive strategy that justified colonial expansion or “colouring in.”⁹² What Bloom regards as a nineteenth-century imperial strategy can also be detected today, in that Antarctic space is similarly left “blank” in contemporary discourse, and as such is mapped with selective historiographies that benefit their authors and national/private interests behind them. However, taking a spatial approach to the history of polar farce allows us

⁹² Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 2.

to consider these regions as home to repetitive dressing-up, a more effective approach than regarding each performance as a one-off, isolated event. The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe shows that Antarctica hosted competing yet complementary ideologies of colonialism and cultural critique, and can be viewed similarly today. This long-fetishised space was not solely a place for aggressive imperialistic acquisition and masculine trial by ice, but also one, to borrow Matthew Rebhorn's phrasing of the American Western frontier, "that is thematically richer, more diverse, and more radical than has been previously supposed."⁹³ In other words, Antarctica "generated cultural energy" of its own, despite the fact that it has, like other frontiers before it, remained seemingly monolithic in historical analysis, providing a sublime but deadly background to exploration and scientific discovery.⁹⁴ The theatrical reimaginings of daily hardships in the minstrel show, specific only to Antarctica, turned the continent into a subject of critical drama. Anything but a backdrop, it took centre stage.

As such, these habitual theatricals map onto a seemingly ahistorical Antarctica a rich, contested history; they colour in the continent, with all the race and class connotations suggested by Bloom. The themes of the dramatic performances spoke directly to Antarctic social structures and their resultant tensions, and can be viewed as the product of heated struggles over the gendered, racialised and classed politics of nationalistic Antarctic exploration. Though the setting of the earlier performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave* was London, the donning of frocks spoke to and critiqued the gender exclusivity of the region, the bodily transformations through costume providing a cathartic imaging of the men's own corporeal adjustments. Similarly, the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe evoked a

⁹³ Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 5.

⁹⁴ Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 21.

Southern mythology so that the polar explorer could see in the faithful slave (and its classed performer) a distorted reflection of himself, one that rendered him a noble figure that would gain entry into heaven upon an icy death. This perverse polar-plantation ideology, the likening of old cabins to the leaky *Discovery*, suggests that the recreational activities of the men were complicit in superimposing the very worst of ideologies onto a landscape devoid of permanent human inhabitants.

However, I would also suggest that blackface simultaneously generated something of a radical streak on the continent, or, to borrow Rebhorn's phrasing again, it carved out a "weird frontier" – an alternative reading of the frontier that bent, warped and teased the hegemonic one imagined and perpetuated by men like Clements Markham. In this weird liminality, blackface clowning and cross-dressing were not only a license to try on different racialised and sexualised personas. The performance of these subjectivities was also a potentially subversive act that reappropriated weight from the dominant narrative of the frontier: that of the production of the elite white hero. I have argued that the production of theatre appropriated time and resources from the production of heroism; likewise, the performance of the Other by those actually experiencing the frontier suggests to me that the men felt compelled to use creative energy and freedom to offer up alternative, interrogative ideologies to liberate the land they were growing to love from its wholly one-dimensional representation as a place to build muscle and empire; similar to the American West, they "created a 'weird' frontier that neither demanded nor invited the juggernaut of conquest to settle its 'unsettled' lands but that worked actively to 'unsettle' precisely the

ideology popularized and promulgated” by those at home.⁹⁵ For example, the theatrical celebration of blackness offered the audience, both in the hut and back home, a radical interpretation that actually allowed for the black body – however distorted – to have presence in Antarctica; from peeking behind a curtain, “the black man” was given the centre stage.

All this suggests that there was never a monolithic definition of the polar frontier, but that multiple readings vied and overlapped to reflect myriad experiences, and that more than anywhere else these multiple frontiers were contested through drama. While the polar frontier restaged empire through the traversing of space and manly activity, the theatrical stage *on* the frontier became a space for playing out its inherent paradoxes.⁹⁶ The conundrums at the beginning of the minstrel show remind us how classed experiences of polar spaces could give rise to differing levels of appreciation of Antarctica and subsequent social conflict. Where the frontier meant the pursuit of scientific enquiry for credentialed experts, the expansion of colonial boundaries for the officer class, for the crew of the mess deck it was an altogether more depressing affair.

⁹⁵ Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 11.

⁹⁶ Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 18.



Figure 4: *Flying Scud*. Photographer unknown. Reproduced by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

One more *Discovery* rematerialisation needs to be accounted for. In the year following the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe, Barne constructed a sled with a full set of sails, the *Flying Scud*, which was used for ferrying equipment and built reusing materials from previous endeavours and adventures the crew had faced. This included the props that constituted the staging of the Royal Terror Theatre. The sails were taken from the drop scene: on the foresail of the sled was the word “THEATRE,” visible in the photo above; on the aft sail the volcano drawn to represent Mount Terror, which loomed over the *Discovery* and the hut. On 29 April 1903, Barne decided to use the front curtain from the theatre to improve the *Scud*, with a curious consequence: the “huge nigger’s head” – the black face Barne had painted on the curtain for the minstrel show – was used as a sail, becoming a moving part of the Antarctic landscape as it helped transport crucial equipment used for scientific and imperial progress. Though no photo remains,

the image is easy to conjure: a fantastical, farcical and offensive black caricature moving back and forth across white Antarctica.

Thus, the performance of the minstrel show, and all its inherent connotations and contradictions, was extended far beyond the night at the Royal Terror Theatre. Dramatist Mike Pearson notes: “So what begins as a ship’s tarpaulin, becomes a theatre curtain, becomes a sail. In this extreme milieu, objects circulate, lose stability, no longer confined to their ascribed identity.”⁹⁷ I would add on to this theorisation that the recycling of items from dramatic stage back to imperial stage underscores the functionality of theatrical endeavours to expeditions, the literal “stuff” of farce going on to become the stuff of imperial force. This represents an inversion of the idea presented earlier that explorers appropriated materials from a finite pool to enjoy perverse play, as play could also feed back into the pool. In the *Flying Scud* example, the racist entertainment became a part of the literal and figurative landscape of the expedition. In the end, though some objects may have physically changed in the degrading and warping ice, it was those that underwent theatrical conversions that represented best the true colours of the expedition.

To conclude, I suggest that viewing Antarctica as anything but an empty landscape and instead as a rich cultural contestation effectively diversifies its largely celebratory and monolithic history, thereby producing a radical picture of an essentialised space. On 6 August there were, of course, multiple racial and class discourses at play. On the one hand, the minstrel show was part of a wider set of theatricals that challenged the hegemonic view of the frontier as a monolithic testing ground for men by those that actually lived and experienced it.

⁹⁷ Pearson, “No Joke in Petticoats,” 56.

On the other, I argue that in a colonial space with no Other to manage, the crew felt compelled to perform him themselves. By choosing to clown for the highers-up, the mess deck reaffirmed their imperial righteousness by creating a spectacle out of the allegedly inferior racially defined Other. In one performance, then, the minstrel character became a condensed receptacle for imperial contradictions.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that an examination of blackface in colonial settings reveals a host of racial and imperial contradictions. The Dishcover Minstrel Troupe was a cathartic exercise that allowed the men to air pretensions regarding glory and fears about death from behind a black mask while maintaining the very racial hierarchies that gave them license to analogise perversely the nostalgic sorrow of slavery. The songs were used to construct a world where the men were heroic sufferers in extreme conditions, who would enjoy a heavenly release from Antarctica and a final bodily transformation back into civilised garb, should they succumb to the very real possibility of death. The triangulation of Antarctic hardship, Southern nostalgia and British imperialism was startling. At the darkest of times, the minstrel songs offered the British men imagery of stable, fictitious space, “turning the South into a kind of timeless lost home, a safe, imaginary childhood.”⁹⁸ I have suggested that the faithful slave narratives of the American South tacitly became one of the dominating features of British blackface, arguing that it masked complicity in the establishment of slavery and inertia over its prolonged influence. While British blackface rendered

⁹⁸ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 191.

the black slave as a noble figure for the suffering he endured, the faithful slave narratives of America allowed performers to suggest simultaneously that his emancipation was only achievable at the paternalist hands of whites.

The liminality produced by costuming, heightened by the breakage in reality provided through supposedly out-of-place black figures in all-white Antarctica, also allowed the lowest ranks of servicemen to express discontent at the established social and climatic hierarchies during the expedition. The puns or conundrums were the most basic attempt at turning aggression into humour, their low wit suggesting that some crewmembers were yearning for a return to care-free youthful times, while some performers – lifelong working stiff – sought safety and a cessation of endless work routines. The costumes that the crew prepared weeks before the show, in essence the long-term production of theatre, detracts from and interrogates the on-going production of heroism, as does the large black face on the sail of Barne's *Flying Scud*: they point to the cyclical lives of objects, which can be materialised and rematerialised to the needs and prejudices of the men who use them, even for forceful and farcical purposes in an imperial environment.

With no local population against to which to mark their progress, the crewmembers, of varied socio-economic classes, performed the minstrel show to remind themselves of the cause of their mission: transgression into Antarctic space promoted the progress of the human race. Some of them were masters of this process. I suggest that the show is of crucial significance to Antarctic history, colouring in a past that has been dominated by elite white men and their white maps. In this milieu, the black figure became a figure of transnational importance, his presence on Antarctica, though by proxy and through distorted

representation, serving as a reminder of his paradoxical centrality to the white colonial imaginary and all its subsequent endeavours.

Conclusion

No more performances followed the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe during the *Discovery* Expedition, which returned home in the early months of 1904. The minstrel show's exaggerated, hyperbolic nature – from its hysterical laughter to its disturbing analogy between black slave and white sailor – proved to be the peak of polar performance during the crew's time in Antarctica. Perhaps officers realised that the minstrel show undermined their authority as it featured playful shots at Captain Scott; perhaps sailors felt they had little left to say, their critique affecting scant change. The sailors' workloads became heavier with the return of sunshine, only putting the Royal Terror Theatre further out of mind.

The second winter of 1903 was an allegedly more congenial affair, the expedition's less-favoured members having departed Antarctic shores with the *Morning* relief ship in 1903. The winds, according to Scott, blew far less that year, which changed the experience of polar winter and necessitated less palliative activities to combat the terror.¹ In this more comfortable milieu, the crew did not put on any performances in 1903; second-in-command Albert Armitage noted: "It seemed a pity that we did not have any more theatricals, but the longer we stayed in the Antarctic, the less inclined do we feel for that kind of effort."²

However, the frozen farce of Scott's *Discovery* expedition was not the end of cross-dressing in Antarctica. Ernest Shackleton, who went back to Britain on the *Morning* relief expedition in early 1903 due to serious frostbite sustained during a sledging excursion, controversially returned to Antarctica as leader of a

¹ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 506.

² Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, 99.

privately funded expedition. Despite widespread public, private and even international opinion that McMurdo Sound and the route it offered to the South Pole were now Scott's symbolic and geographic territory, Shackleton sailed the *Nimrod* south in 1907.³ By landing at McMurdo Sound and setting up a base there, Shackleton broke his personal promise to Scott that he would not use the territory, which Scott himself felt firmly his own. The *Nimrod* Expedition attained many scientific and geographical achievements, notably reaching a new furthest south of 88° 23' S, only 180.6 kilometres from the pole, but it left Shackleton forever in disfavour with many of the crew and supporters of the *Discovery*: Clements Markham was furious, while Edward Wilson would never speak to him again.⁴ This contest over Antarctic space between a handful of rich white men was the epitome of the tussle of symbolic ownership of land, land that was fertile for the creation of narratives of individuated heroism and its attendant masculine, imperial and financial gain.

Like other expeditions of its time, the *Nimrod* was saturated with homoerotic tension. However, the manner in which this tension surfaced only to be forcibly subverted speaks to shifting paradigms of sexuality occurring at the beginning of the twentieth century. During previous expeditions studied in this thesis, the fear of non-normative sexuality was a largely unspoken yet powerful social tension that coursed behind many formative decisions, from William Edward Parry's strict timetable of chores to Michael Barne's plot alteration of Mary Ann. At the time of the *Nimrod*'s departure from British shores, however, non-normative sexual desire was understood less in terms of acts and behaviours. Rather, medical discourse had constructed the identity of the modern

³ Fiennes, *Captain Scott*, 145.

⁴ Fiennes, *Captain Scott*, 144–45.

homosexual, a person who habitually performed same-sex acts and had begun to conceive their affection for men as identitarian.⁵ At the same time, the homosexual became a broad, public and conflated representation of many sexual “perversions” – from sodomy to transvestism – and the physical target of discrimination and loathing. Where levels of queer desire had been part and parcel of homosocial society, seldom spoken but always influential, it was now increasingly out in the open and attracting the attention of lawmakers and enforcers, social reformers and the medical profession.⁶



Figure 5: Marston “Putty the inimitable.” Reproduced by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

⁵ See: Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*.

⁶ Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

This flourishing of (homo)sexuality in public discourse, and the subsequent loathing of the queer individual, was reflected in the manner in which the *Nimrod* placated its own inherent homoeroticism. George Marston, one of the two official artists on the expedition, cross-dressed to the amusement, then discomfort, of the crew. As shown in the photo above, Marston took to his role enthusiastically, posing with grace and, tellingly, happy to wear little clothing in potentially near-freezing temperatures. Raymond Priestly, the geologist, wrote:

A great deal of amusement was caused today by Marston dressing up as a woman and behaving very affectionately to the whole expedition. He was so pressing in his attentions in fact that Mackay had to tell him that he would spit at him unless he took himself off, while Mawson remarked in a sad tone of voice that “it was all very well but he was not the real thing.”⁷

Marston’s over-affection, his verbal and physical sexual suggestiveness, went too far for the sensibilities of some, proving a threat to the normative masculine order that officially augmented the expedition. Where previous expeditions favoured cross-dressing as a means of harmless recreation, such as the masquerade ball witnessed by Markham in 1850–51, the practice on the *Nimrod* was now considered within the realm of obscenity. However, this adverse reaction was not so strong that Marston could not pose for the photo above, suggesting an overlap between competing discourses of acceptance and transgression. Nevertheless, the frosty reception to his gaudy cross-dressing confirms a shift in attitude from normative to stigmatic. This shift in attitude affirms that cross-dressing’s position at the interface of normal and deviant

⁷ D. Wilson, *Nimrod Illustrated: Pictures from Lieutenant Shackleton’s British Antarctic Expedition* (Cheltenham: Reardon Publishing, 2009), 70.

moves across time and space, this widespread social change even occurring in a space as allegedly atemporal, humanless and “blank” as the Antarctic.

In Scott’s next and last expedition, 1910–13, there would be no theatricals, only his dramatic death, played out on the global stage as Britain and Norway raced for the South Pole. However, the Hut, that simple piece of construction, hosted one more set of theatricals before it became frozen in time as a historical monument to Scott and his men, one of 34 Antarctic Heritage Trust sites now on the continent. The crew of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911–14 – whose name apparently referenced imperial designs rather than non-Commonwealth participants – performed an original opera on 12 October 1912, *The Washerwomen’s Secret*, an apparently fabulous transformation for the building according to the official account of the expedition: “Part of the Hut was curtained off as a combined green-room and dressing-room; the kitchen was the stage; footlights twinkled on the floor; the acetylene limelight beamed down off the rafters, while the audience crowded on... making tactless remarks and steadily eating chocolate” – that imperial concoction so heavily freighted with raced, classed, and gendered assumptions.⁸ This is a fitting description of the last performance held in a hut that witnessed so many miraculous bodily transformations, from heroic to erotic, blacked-up to frocked-up.

This thesis has argued that a critical examination of cross-dressing and blackface during Anglo-American, but also Norwegian and Australasian, polar exploration, a wholly understudied aspect of these all-male expedition societies,

⁸ Douglas Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 209. See: Emma Robertson, *Chocolate, women and empire: A social and cultural history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

exposes the homoerotic, racist and classed ideologies underpinning this most vaunted, “heroic” enterprise. Contextualised with reference to vast and sometimes celebratory historiographies of polar exploration, it has used the published and unpublished diaries of explorers, scientists and sailors from 1819 to 1904 to show that theatrical endeavours were both palliative and formative to expedition society: they were a crucial component of “success” in the Arctic and Antarctic, allowing men cathartically to release pent-up sexual, classed, colonial and gendered fears and ambitions while they impressed upon sailors and officers a temporal and emotional structure through harsh winter months. Furthermore, I have shown that cross-dressing and blackface were not insular activities: they also formed some of the most surreal, symbolic interaction with Arctic Inuit, who witnessed polar performance and its many inherent gendered and racial values during various Anglo-American expeditions.

In Chapter 1, I argued that polar performance was a cathartic endeavour that evolved its own idiosyncrasies, tropes and traditions from the 1810s onwards when William Edward Parry, considered the founding father of Western polar exploration, established the Royal Arctic Theatre. Shaped by the climatic and social environment, polar theatre, and in particular cross-dressing and blackface, became an outlet for homoerotic tension, it had palliative qualities for sailors and officers, and it was complicit in the maintenance of imperial might. I suggested that theatre’s ability to placate polar society was related to the incessant inspections, both private and public, that officers and sailors went through in an effort to ward off polar diseases. I then tracked polar performance’s development by examining the writing of Markham, who witnessed a sensational masquerade ball in the early 1850s between four ships locked in the Arctic ice under Captain

Horatio Austin's command. Markham's description of the drunken, homoerotic mayhem exposed the polar frontier as a space where opportunities for sexualised and racialised play flourished, transforming the extreme cold – a purportedly natural means to test hardy masculinity – into an occasion for bodily contact, interaction, and warmth, making men "hot" for one another. Finally, I analysed American influences on polar performance via "negro songs" of the First Grinnell Expedition, commanded by Lieutenant Edwin De Haven. I argued that surgeon Elisha Kent Kane's chronicle of the expedition linked discourses of pathology, class and race in its outright valorisation of the elite members of the crew, with its concomitant denigration of class subordinates and racial "inferiors."

Chapter 2 turned to Arctic blackface via the early-1860s writings of Charles Francis Hall, a religious zealot, colonialist and fanatic. As demonstrated, images of wholesome white womanhood were crucial to the American colonial project in the north: Hall promoted Victorian middle-class definitions of allegedly virtuous, if not saintly, womanhood to Inuit. He promoted "good" hygiene and the Bible, seeing similarities in the aim of the two: the washing away of dirt and sin. But a closer examination of Hall's private journals revealed his obsession with Inuit women as also sexual in nature. Commenting on the size of breasts and detailing sleeping with naked Inuit, Hall and his Christian missionary efforts cannot be extricated from the colonial politics of the white male hero-adventurer above others. A night of blackface produced another definition of womanhood crucial to the expedition. Before an audience that included Inuit, a cross-dressed and blacked-up whaler demonstrated dominant values of gender and race by portraying African-Americans and women as ill

suited to citizenship on the eve of the Civil War. The “negress” was performed by a working-class whaler who was complicit in imperial might, but less so than the elite policymakers, highlighting the capacity of amateur blackface to impart the values of performer-colonisers to the subjugated. However, the unreliable description of the night, which hyperbolised Inuit terror, was another racialised rendering worthy of critical consideration.

In Chapter 3, I argued that the climate of Antarctica regulated the microphysics of daily life for the crew of the *Discovery* Expedition, 1901–04. I charted the crew’s fixation with the climate, which drew bodies together for warmth as it created a sense of overbearing, daily threat. Living in this dominating, restricting environment, the crew – first fractious but then unified through a failed Crossing the Line ceremony – began to glamorise the male form. Weekly medical inspections in pyjamas and regular weightlifting competitions became erotic arenas as men noticed changes in each other’s compositions and marvelled at muscular forms. These performative acts, which helped reclaim a sense of agency over the environment, were matched by effervescent, camp performances at the Royal Terror Theatre: dogged determination at daily rehearsals, despite terrible storms, helped crack the hegemony of night and weather that winter. *A Ticket-of-Leave* was a production of corporeal defiance as the audience witnessed men standing bravely in inadequate women’s clothing on stage, frostbite encroaching on their extremities. The script alterations, particularly the introduction of the character Mary Ann – a common pseudonym for an effeminate man or a prostitute – spoke to the burgeoning homoerotic tensions of the expedition, while it also warned men not to act on their desires.

Likewise addressed principally to the *Discovery*, Chapter 4 focused on the last performance held in the flimsy hut built on shore: the Dishcover Minstrel Troupe. This minstrel show, highly racist, was a palliative performance that allowed the sailors from the lower decks, burdened with the most mundane tasks of “exploration,” to air grievances at the climate and captain alike through lowbrow wisecracks. While they perversely analogised their predicament with that of the American South’s plantation slaves, the show also served to keep racial hierarchies firmly in place through songs about the figurative death of the black body. Death, indeed, was a prevalent theme: the men used the black mask and the liminality it offered to explore fears regarding their own mortality and glory upon returning home or to a higher celestial plane. While the men seemed, in some sense, to sympathise with the faithful slave, they suggested his emancipation could only be achieved at the hands of paternalist whites. They extended this logic to legitimise their incursion into Antarctic space: by reminding themselves of the subjugated, inferior racialised Other, they augmented the expedition with supremacist sentiment, seeing their divinely ordained exploration as part of their role as global caretakers. Like the performance of *A Ticket-of-Leave*, the minstrel show took weeks to prepare, turning the usually serious business of living in Antarctica into a laughing matter. Ordinary props, from sails to skins, were reconstituted into items of racist ridicule, turning the stuff of imperial force into the service of racist farce. These items were then pressed back into the imperial fold as they found themselves on the polar landscape in almost surrealist ways.

From these arguments, two additional but major interventions have emerged. The first is that climates and sexualities are shown to be in perpetual,

reciprocal relationship, with temperatures necessarily complicit in the growth and maintenance of same-sex desire. Despite some gesturing towards temperature's relation to social process, the humanities have been slow to recognise that climatic conditions can affect how eroticised bodies feel and function, whether through severely restricting a sense of spatiality or necessitating aggregation for warmth. These reactions to climate can become active facilitators of same-sex desire, eroticising the compromised body as it attempts to ward off the consequences of frostbite, depression and scurvy through the performance of virile physicality. Furthermore, climatic conditions can be infused with the politics of race, gender and class: the racialised Other and women were not seen as suitable candidates for survival in extreme temperatures. Working-class whalers, sailors and others may have joined expeditions, but they were also relegated to the lower decks and never given the kind of individuated glory that captains and scientists enjoyed by their alleged successful navigation of dangerous climates. Temperature, then, was drawn into a familiar discourse in which it was deemed the measuring stick of elite white masculinity, even as it produced queer implications.

The second is that the study of blackface abroad interrogates and diversifies the currently body of scholarship, which is American-centred at the expense of demonstrable British iterations and, more crucially, distinctive forms found in colonial spaces. Amateur blackface in the Arctic and Antarctic exposes the frequency with which this performance tradition was mobilised outside of the taverns and dancehalls; if sailors brought blackface all the way to icy shores, then the black mask was surely a regular, almost institutionalised, aspect of naval or indeed all working- and upper-class culture. Scholarly studies, however, have

tended to focus on the most commercialised, popular forms, thereby ignoring a potentially fascinating locus of racial performance. Amateur blackface was detached from most financial concerns, thus able to speak to immediate conditions and local anxieties. These localities encompassed non-black/non-white racialised Others, suggesting that whites felt compelled to use the black body as a means to speak to Others in the imperial project, notably indigenous peoples.

Further discernible from this concluding chapter summary, polar performance developed in sophistication and nuance over the course of polar exploration. The many classed, racial and colonial themes running behind the minstrel show during the *Discovery* Expedition seem a world away from the first performances put on by Parry in the 1810s and early 1820s, which featured officers as actors engaged in propaganda, providing simple messages about success on ice. The increasing numbers of sailors in the theatre brought to the stage more conflict and tension as the lower decks used this space to air discontent. As sailors learnt to read and write over the course of the nineteenth century, so too were they better able to document their own participation. Reticent as descriptions usually seem, it is possible to read behind the words of some, like Gilbert Scott, to understand better their attitudes towards performing on stage to audiences shivering in the cold.

The study of cross-dressing and blackface during polar exploration also opens up questions regarding the composition of polar expedition society, those who have since been labelled “explorers” and those who have since been forgotten. By studying performances of the past, it is possible to see that there were far more “actors” on stage – both theatrical and imperial – than commonly

assumed. Performances reveal that many actors had their own grievances and aspirations, distinct from the elite few at the top; they resisted environmental and classed oppression through drama, subtly interrogating seemingly sacrosanct hierarchies; they also imparted coloniser values to Inuit through their recreational activities: amateur blackface. In short, drama becomes one way to read lower-class agency in historical literatures that have largely ignored the diversity of expedition society, in favour of essentialising the now monolithic figures of captains, officers and scientists.

This thesis has not only served to diversify the homosocial cultures of Western men who traversed the Arctic and Antarctic. As well as exposing human variety, it has also uncovered a forgotten, more radical aspect of polar history well worth celebrating. As argued in Chapter 4, the history of cross-dressing and blackface in Antarctica produced another, weirder definition of the icy frontier, one contested on stage, reflecting the differing experiences men of differing classes had on the continent. Theatrical endeavour colours what Lisa Bloom refers to as the seemingly “blank” nature of polar space and history. At present, with the Antarctic earmarked for yet more scientific and new climate-change narratives, and as the response to these narratives are increasingly masculinised and militarised, cross-dressing and blackface provide a counter-story, at times positive in nature while at times not. Whatever their racist, colonialist and sexist connotations, however, these productions in the Arctic and Antarctic were nevertheless sophisticated, determined efforts that spoke to local concerns. While the extreme conditions of their production can never be reproduced, these historical polar performances emerge from new scholarship as a unique form of polar culture that, now uncovered, should not be taken off stage. Historians of

polar spaces should look to performance as another way of further understanding polar society and, ultimately, diversifying the history of Arctic and Antarctic spaces. Doing so will disrupt the scientific and masculine hegemony dominating most media, scholarly enquiry and popular interest.

The Hut used during the *Discovery* Expedition is currently undergoing a two-year conservation and restoration project by the Antarctic Heritage Trust.⁹ The trust is an international charity with governmental support from New Zealand, Britain, Norway, Ireland, the United States and corporations and private donors. It works for long-term conservation of historical sites in order to sustain the well-celebrated narratives of polar exploration for future generations. Like other institutions operating in Antarctica, its boundaries exceed that of the nation state, in that it operates with the backing of differing sovereignties towards a goal it designates crucial for all humankind, in an area seemingly devoid of governmental entities. However, like other institutions in the area, these ostensibly porous boundaries are not wholly inclusive. The narratives that the trust seeks to perpetuate, those produced by Scott, Shackleton and other white, Western men, for future generations, cement, in fact, a very raced and gendered Western hegemony over Antarctic space. That is, the masculine, heroic and elitist narratives of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration (the naming of this period a construction itself) are being made synonymous with the continent, as though these exclusive narratives are a natural extension of its icy shores.

⁹ Antarctic Heritage Trust, "Project Status," accessed 15 September 2014, <https://www.nzah.org/AHT/ProjectStatus/>. It is hoped that the organisation's work in the Hut will reveal further clues to the performances put on there with the discovery of scripts or song sheets hidden among the clutter.

Antarctica, as it currently stands, has no traditional governing body to speak of. Rather, the Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959 by 12 countries, designates the continent a preserve for scientific, environmental and peaceful enterprise only; military activity, such as weapons testing, as well as mining and waste disposal, is outlawed. Since 1959, the treaty has gained 38 signatories. States not party to the treaty have created some anxiety among Western analysts and scholars, as with Pakistan, which sent expeditions to the continent in the 1990s and maintains two summer stations with the hope of creating a permanent base.¹⁰

Simultaneous to the treaty, seven states claim sovereignty over parts of Antarctica: Argentina, Chile, Australia and New Zealand, countries close to the continent that regard it as “a dynamic marker of national identity and prestige,” and Great Britain, Norway and France, which have claimed land rights based on their historical, explorative and exploitative activities in the region.¹¹ However, any build-up of physical, concrete presence – such as the construction of a runway in French “territory” that destroyed penguin colonies – has been met with outright condemnation, signalling the unfavourable atmosphere towards concentration of humankind and power. While some countries use their sovereign claims on occasion to further their own interests, as with the case of France’s runway, these claims are generally rejected by other nation states both with and without their own claims.

Overall, there has been no armed conflict on the continent in all its history. The treaty has acted as an efficient nuclear disarmament model, while most scientific activity in particular has proceeded with respect to sovereign territory claims, thereby overriding most attempts to demarcate space. In the

¹⁰ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics in Antarctica: Views from the Southern Oceanic Rim* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), x–xi.

¹¹ Dodds, *Geopolitics in Antarctica*, xi.

International Geophysical Year of 1957–58, nation states freely located research stations within other claimants’ territories. Since then, thousands of scientists have staffed outposts littered around the continent, securing a sense of global participation.¹² Antarctica remains a huge landmass with no unified governing body, an anomaly on Earth considering how minutely the planet’s lands, waters and airspace are demarcated with the borders of nation states. While the overlapping of claims, non-claims and treaties have resulted in some anxieties, this ambiguity is paradoxically beneficial. The murkiness of law gives no single entity the outright privilege to step up its activity while every other entity has the right to complain. The continent remains a “military-free zone at the philosophical level.”¹³

The Arctic, by contrast, enjoys no such formal treaty as the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, and, unlike its southern equivalent, is increasingly seen as an area of potential conflict. The issue here is, of course, climate change and the melting of sea ice that previously hindered easy passage but now renders the Arctic Ocean as increasingly open and accessible. There seem vast natural resources beneath Arctic ice – namely oil and gas – and as private and national interests vie to extract these forms of wealth with the recession of ice and development of technology, more symbolic and formal territorial claims are appearing.¹⁴ Paradoxically, Antarctica is a landmass, but its territorial claims are few and generally overlooked, with greater attention given to cooperation in the pursuit of scientific discovery. The Arctic, however, is a largely frozen ocean,

¹² Dodds, *Geopolitics in Antarctica*, 15.

¹³ William Fox, *Terra Antarctica: Looking into the Emptiest Continent* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2005), 35.

¹⁴ Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow’s Natural Resources* (London: Continuum, 2009), 63. See also: Laurence Smith, *The New North: The World in 2050* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

but the diverse and disputed methods of claiming sovereignty over water have created a hotbed of issues between the Arctic Five – Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway and Denmark – and other neighbouring countries.¹⁵ The result is an increasingly tense dispute over riparian rights, which resolutely ignores environmental concerns and the claims of indigenous populations.

The polar explorers' predisposition for sexually and racially charged sartorial play, regardless of different nationalities and cultures, complicates both old and new notions of territory in the Arctic and Antarctic. Performance exposes, rather nakedly, the crass imperialist incursions into these spaces, perpetuated today by historical societies such as the Antarctic Heritage Trust, which works to synthesise the histories of heroic white men with the whiteness of the continent. Sara Wheeler, a popular travel writer and historian, is the author of *Terra Incognita*, a widely read book detailing her journey to Antarctica and back, as she develops a devotion to Scott, Shackleton and other men in leadership positions. Preparing for her trip south at the archive of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, she writes: "I worked my way through blubber-splashed pages of leather notebooks inscribed by the men who gave Antarctica a history."¹⁶ What Wheeler suggests, in a similar vein to other polar historians and historical societies, is that Antarctic history has been produced by a handful of men. National interests have latched onto these "heroic" stories, working them into the landscape of the continent as a means to naturalise the idea that only white, hardy men can have a lasting impact on the Antarctic continent. Such productions have the power to leave out that which does not fit well: drag actors,

¹⁵ The Arctic Five refers to the five countries with coasts adjacent to the ocean. These issues stem from vague international law, which makes it possible to claim territory using a variety of laws, including all water in a 200-mile radius from any land, where continental shelves end out at sea, and through the shady definition of "internal waters." See Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush*, 45–61.

¹⁶ Sara Wheeler, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), 4.

racisms, elitism, misogyny – these other narratives, all viewable through the prism of polar performance, reveal that the laboured production and continual reproduction of Antarctic history lacks dexterity and inclusivity. While the polar regions are still international, if not supranational, areas, symbolic and cultural ownership is nevertheless being contested. The image of explorer-in-drag is not commensurable with his manly heroism and therefore works to interrogate this cultural production, but it also works to disrupt the appropriation of such images by those making national and private claims to the Arctic and Antarctic.

Despite proclamations that the Arctic and Antarctica should be nature preserves for scientific and environmental benefit for all humankind – as if those very concepts were uncontested – the polar history of blackface suggests that these pristine, largely unpeopled places have played host to startling racism. Explorers considered foundational in Arctic and Antarctic history blacked-up during their time on the ice and snow, acts and performances resolutely ignored or brushed over by vested interests. Blackface entertainment is often rationalised within the confines of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theatrical normativity, but such apologetics should be resolutely ignored. Blackface exposes the hegemony of white Western men at the poles, its failure to achieve recognition in the body of repetitive polar historiography a perpetuation of this Eurocentrism.

The legacy of this racism lives on in other, broader ways. The first African-American to step onto the Antarctic continent, George W. Gibbs, Jr., only did so in 1940, some 40 years after Captain Scott and his sailors brought grotesque representations of black culture to the south. Antarctica remains very white today; although it is difficult to find demographic information, black

scientists, tourists and artists on the continent are rare, leading one professor of geology planning an expedition to the continent to remark: “‘I’m tired of having a bunch of white people running around doing science... When it comes to Antarctica, it isn’t just the landscape that’s white.’” The expedition, funded by America’s National Science Foundation, sends some 300 scientists down south each year. It is estimated that only three or four African-American scientists have ever been included.¹⁷

In some ways, however, the history of polar performance is commensurable with the supranationalism of the Arctic and Antarctic. As argued at the beginning of this thesis, polar performance was a transnational endeavour: actors were of many Western nationalities and the sites of recreational theatre were themselves located in areas incongruent with traditional notions of territory. The ubiquity of polar performance suggests that men of different nationalities and cultures were bound by a shared appreciation of white men dressed as women and black folk. As well as scientific discovery, adventure and environmental preservation, cross-dressing and blackface therefore become another unifying endeavour inherent to the polar regions. This suggests that interest in sexual and racial Others is a deep-rooted, cross-cultural and cross-gender aspect of Western culture. Put differently, the common interest in sartorial experimentation among mostly Western societies is uniquely exposed in the Arctic and Antarctic, which exist as non-territorial “blank” spaces but have played host to many expeditions, each surely representative of masculine, white hegemony in home societies while also exposing favour of farce.

¹⁷ Sara Rimer, “Harlem to Antarctica for Science, and Pupils,” *The New York Times*, accessed 19 August 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/28/nyregion/28teacher.html>.

This thesis has already suggested many further avenues of research. The two interventions outlined earlier – that is, the reciprocal influence of climatic environmental and sexuality as well as the study of amateur blackface – should be taken in new directions. Furthermore, there is a need to study same-sex sexuality in more permanent settlements and indigenous homelands of the Arctic.

Firstly, as argued throughout, there are no book-length studies on the effects of low and high temperatures on sexuality. In *Men Like That*, an acclaimed monograph on queer sexuality in mid-twentieth-century Mississippi, John Howard argues that roadside parks – covered, dark, secretive – emerged as popular and highly suitable sites for homosexual activity for men who desired men in the American South. “Roadside and beachfront areas, county and state parks, forests and lakes, riversides and other gathering places. Homosexual meanings and readings, desires and actions could surface at most any roadside get-together.” Nature’s cover gave many men ample opportunity; one would only need to drive out at night to find sex, with one queer Southerner, Mark Ingall, reminiscing that he could find a trick anytime he went out to a rest area.¹⁸ But Mississippi’s relative warmth was surely a factor in rendering the rural park as such an amicable and busy cruising space. The ease with which homosexual could occur at these roadside spots would be in stark contrast to far colder climates, which, uncomfortable or even dangerous, would not be able to facilitate same-sex contact in the outdoors so easily.¹⁹ If the closeted, shadowy space where

¹⁸ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 112–13.

¹⁹ In a review of *Men Like That*, Marc Stein touched upon the notion that the temperature of Mississippi affected same-sex desire. Comparing the South to rural New England, he writes: “At the very least, queer life in the far north has probably been more indoors than it has been in the deep south.” This is, however, the extent of Stein’s (and other’s) analysis. Marc Stein, review of *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, by John Howard, *Journal of Social History* 35:2 (2001): 474.

same-sex intimacy can occur moves from the grass to the inside of a car to even the secrecy of a bedroom based on the level of climatic warmth, then it seems climatic variation can, indeed, impose itself on human sexuality, and vice versa.

As such, further research is required to elucidate the impact temperature has on sexualising bodies. Is warm climate seen to inflect queerness upon men, who wear less clothing and are able to roam more freely? Are queer men in warm climates often racialised? That is, has hot temperature been regarded as something that breaks down or queers non-white masculinity in Western discourse? In colder climates, how did men who desire men facilitate their sexual urges, where a prolonged roadside encounter was impossible or could result in a hospital encounter with freezing extremities or hypothermia?

Secondly, there is no comprehensive study of amateur blackface outside polar spaces, which seems a huge oversight considering its probable ubiquity: if sailors brought with them blackface practices to the Arctic and Antarctic, then it seems likely that ordinary men and women in countless scenarios in North America, Europe and the colonial “abroad” were blacking-up for amusement and to provide local social critique. Beyond the study of blackface as it happened to appear in particular times or spatialities, however, there has been no attempt to draw together an overview, to understand how non-monetised forms both spoke to the black-white racial binary (or more complex racialised continuums) and critiqued the hegemonic, widely popular forms performed by an elite few who enjoyed wealth and fame.

New studies of blackface in rural and non-urban spaces are especially needed, with the literature on racial performance cited in this thesis all skewed heavily toward metropolitan sites such as taverns, docks and dance halls. How

often and why were working-class citizens blacking-up for their own amusement? Was amateur blackface a regular occurrence at village schools, churches and commons? Was blackface exported to others colonies, especially those with few or no black subjects or citizens? How was blackface used as a means of colonial control there?

Finally, this study has analysed the impact of homoeroticism in explorer culture. These expeditions, however, were mobile, transient and finite occurrences that specifically excluded women, thus something of an anomaly in Arctic space. What of more stable, permanent societies in the Arctic? How did temperature affect sexuality among men and women, indigenous and invader, who lived in towns and villages in the High North?

Particular homoeroticised locations beg further study. Foremost among these is Herschel Island, an American whaler boomtown in the Canadian Arctic renowned as a site of sexual and moral transgression. The town was named “The Sodom of the Arctic,” an irony given its licentious activities were brought about by the Victorian penchant for whalebone petticoats and tight corsets.²⁰ In its heyday from 1890 to 1908, a dozen American whaling ships would winter at the island, each September to June. A small community of whaler men, officials, their wives and local Inuit traders flourished in the two decades of its existence. It seems certain that climatic and social conditions facilitated opportunities for same-sex contact, having already shaped interpersonal interactions by increasing the incidence of violence and drinking. Where historians of queer sexuality have shown that marginal spaces were frequently sites of same-sex activity through the discretion they offered, it is likely a severe *lack* of space caused by the sheer

²⁰ See: Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005).

dominance of the immobilising environment brought opportunities for non-normative sexual contact out into the open.

However, encounters with local Inuit further complicate the familiar same-sex narratives that arise in spatially specific studies of queer behaviour. Some whalers took Inuit wives during the winter, paying for their company, outright or in kind. Most of the men, however, could not afford to. Men's anxieties and conflicts were surely exacerbated as these women, exercising as much agency as allowed, were exchanged, subjugated or married. What complicated, triadic relations between the elite men, working-class men and Inuit arose as a result? How was the purchasing of Inuit wives related to social and economic status? How did the missionary differentiate sexual activity with Inuit women, a transgression of racial boundaries, and same-sex activity between men? What extant evidence illuminates practices of same-sex contact between white and Inuit men?

Mounted Police posts may have generated records of cautions, arrests and punishments for varied vice offences and others, of which records may or may not have survived the passage of time. Collections held at the Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, and Yukon Archives, Whitehorse, may hold some answers.²¹ Finally, where this thesis has focused on the society of expeditions, attention to the whalers of Herschel Island opens up further interpretive possibilities. The whalers were generally poor, uneducated, transient men. Though they braved long winters, they were not "heroic" in the sense

²¹ For example, Isaac Stringer was the Anglican missionary sent to Herschel Island after 1892. His records, including personal diaries and sermons, are available at the Yukon Archives and Library and Archives Canada. Yukon Archives, "Isaac and Sadie Stringer Fonds," accessed 15 September 2014, http://yukon.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/4107/DESCRIPTION_WEB/REFD/3679?JUMP

perpetuated by celebratory historiographies of individual upper-class men who traversed the Arctic. Herschel Island presents the possibility of a classed interpretation of how Arctic environments can engender homosocial relations and shape constructions of white masculinity.

This project has laid the groundwork for these avenues of further study. By reclaiming the polar frontier from monolithic historiographies that work to perpetuate its hegemonic narratives, it has shown that polar space, however beautiful and pristine, was and is enmeshed with the oft-disheartening realities of human relations. Furthermore, pulling back the curtain on polar performance, with all its gendered, racial and class paradoxes, helps change that tilt of the earth from the powerful to the under-appreciated. The study of amateur forms of entertainment should now continue beyond polar shores, for each performance – however small, wherever mounted – deserves a scholarly audience.

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